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The Folk-Lore Society

FOR COLLECTING AND PRINTING

RELICS OF POPULAR ANTIQUITIES, &c.

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BRITISH CALENDAR ' CUSTOMS

ORKNEY & SHETLAND

BY
MRS. M. MACLEOD BANKS

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INTRODUCTION

THE Orkney and Shetland Islands are not a region where we may expect to find many details of folklore connected with recurring seasons and the calendar. There was and is active agricultural industry in Orkney, but these island communities have known little of the steady round of occupation in which folk beliefs and customs are rooted in the neighbouring mainland. Folklorists will find more to reward their search in the general daily course of life than in that connected with calendar dates and regulated custom.

We are often reminded of the emigration of peasant groups from Norway who had established themselves in the western isles before the visits of Vikings, yet these sturdy invaders often interrupted peaceful settlement, and though many great Jarls took a share in developing industrious farming, yet the adventures and spoils they were able to offer the younger men lured them to the Viking ships and checked the growth of lore connected with the culture of the soil. Partly on this account it has been found wise to present the folklore of Orkney and Shetland as distinct from that of Scotland, though frequent intercourse brought importation when the mainland Scots crossed the narrow sea to settle among the islanders and when Scottish women married and made their homes among them. Students will no doubt observe borrowing from Scottish sources in the rhymes and observances quoted in this collection. Shetland might have been examined as most closely allied to the Faroe Isles but in the end the inhabitants of all these islands are primarily Norse in origin and their customs should interest specially folklorists in Norway, Denmark and Sweden. Celticists persevere in a search for traces of an earlier Celtic population but what so far may have been discovered is not recognizable in influence on the folklore under review.

Much of the material now presented has been collected from printed sources, from transactions of local antiquarian societies, from the publications of the Viking Society generously placed at the Society's disposal, and from books of island and of Scottish origin, but much also is owing to the help of Mr W. W. Ratter of Shetland and Mr Hugh Marwick of Orkney whose knowledge of the customs, beliefs, history and language of these islands is profound ; they could quote from lifelong

acquaintance and even corroboration was of inestimable value from such sources : without such support this small volume might have been of little use to students, the Society is largely in their debt.

To Mr G. Turville-Petre the editor owes thankful recognition for a few suggestions made on his reading of the MS. and to Dr Heather gratitude is due for his careful and painstaking proof-reading.

The Classification is in line with that of the Society's volumes on Scotland and the Isle of Man and students may find such correspondence helpful when comparing one item with another. Here too the day begins with its preceding eve.

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Kollie, in Scotland as a Crusie - *facing p. 86*

AUTHORITIES QUOTED WITH ABBREVIATED TITLES

- Anc^t Church Ded^s. J. M. Mackinlay, *Ancient Church Dedications in Scotland ; Non-Scriptural*, 1914.
- F-L. : *Folk-Lore* ; Quarterly Transactions of the Folk-Lore Society, 1890 to date.
- F.L.J. : *The Folk-Lore Journal*, Folk-Lore Society, 1883-1889.
- F-L. of Scot. Lochs ; J. M. Mackinlay, *The Folk-Lore of Scottish Lochs and Springs*, 1893.
- Jakobsen : J. Jakobsen, *Etymologisk Ordbog over det Norrøne Sprog på Shetland*, 1908-1921.
- Mlan MS. : Dr MacLagan, Collection of Folklore bequeathed to the Folk-Lore Society in MS.
- Napier : James Napier, *Folk-Lore Beliefs in the West of Scotland within this Century*, etc., 1879.
- N. & Q. : *Notes and Queries*, 1840, to date.
- N.S.A. : *New Statistical Account of Scotland*, by the Ministers of the Respective Parishes, 1834-1845.
- O.S.A. : *Statistical Account of Scotland*, drawn up from the Communications of the Ministers of the respective Parishes ; Ed. by Sir John Sinclair, 1711-1799.
- P.S.A. Scot. : *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, to date.

CLASSIFICATION

THE MONTH.

- I. Names.
- II. Sayings, proverbs, rhymes.
- III. Omens.
- IV. Observances :
 - (a) Festivals, general festivals ; local marked †.
 - (b) Visiting of wells, stones, etc.

DAYS AND MOVABLE FESTIVALS.

- I. Names.
- II. Sayings, proverbs, rhymes.
- III. Saints.
- IV. Omens :
 - (a) Weather and heavenly bodies.
 - (b) Fire, ashes.
 - (c) Water.
 - (d) Persons.
 - (e) Animals, birds, insects.
 - (f) Plants.
 - (g) Food.
- V. Observances : local observances and customs are marked †.
 - (a) Unlucky or forbidden.
 - (b) Lucky or enjoined.
 - (c) Fire, ashes, torches, candles.
 - (d) Rites of divination or augury.
 - (e) The farm, barn, byre.
 - (f) Household ; churning, spinning, sweeping, etc.
 - (g) Fishing and sea-faring.
 - (h) Water.
 - (i) Visiting wells, stones, altars.

DAYS.—*Continued.*

V. Observances.—*continued.*

(*j*) Sacrifice, blood shedding, scapegoat.

(*k*) Doles and gifts.

(*l*) Begging.

(*m*) Food and drink.

(*n*) Pranks and tricks ; indoor games.

(*o*) Habits of animals, birds, insects.

VI. Witchcraft and superstitious beliefs ; fairies.

VII. Natural phenomena.

VIII. Folk medicines.

IX. Mumming, guizing, dramatic performances, dancing.

X. Processions.

XI. Outdoor games, races, mock combats, holiday making.

XII. Festivals, fasts, religious observances.

XIII. Business transactions :

(*a*) Municipal and civic.

(*b*) Private.

XIV. Prohibitions.

WELLS

Long lists of wells visited for healing are not forthcoming for the Orkney and Shetland Isles. The islands of Orkney alone have been counted as amounting to fifty-six, including the small holms, separated from one another by seas often raging and always difficult to cross even in the reliant craft available to pilgrims. These islands had also many lochs in which were islets where stood chapels or shrines dedicated to saints with healing powers, such as St Tredwell's¹ in Papa-Westray. For this the people had 'such a veneration that they will come from other Isles in considerable numbers to it . . . situated on a small low Rock, within a Loch commonly called St Tredwells Loch. . . . Before this chappel door there was a heap of small stones, into which the superstitious People, when they come, do cast a small stone or two for their offering, and some will cast in money.' (Rev. J. Brand, *A brief Description of Orkney & Zetland*, p. 87; original edition, 1701.) On St Ringan's Isle were also the remains of an old chapel believed to be dedicated to this saint (St Ninian). No doubt these shrines were as holy as the wells of the mainland, but a few wells were holy also in the islands. One at least we know was visited by pilgrims from the western mainland of Europe. A description of rites observed at these visits is given by a noted authority.—[Ed.]

Helga Water, in Northmavine, and Yelabrön or Hielyaburn, in the Island of Unst, were famous for their health-giving properties. The latter is one of the finest springs in the island, flowing with undiminished abundance during the most prolonged drought of summer. . . . All persons taking water from this spring brought an offering of three stones, or it might be three coins. . . . When water was brought from it for sick folk, the journey was made between the hours of sunset and sunrise, and generally the bearer of the water obtained an inkling of the patient's chance to recover. It might be they heard a *gaenfore*² or saw a *feyness*;² a white mouse or a black fowl might cross their path. Water from this well must not touch the ground; hence the vessel containing it was generally set on

¹ St. Tredwell, resorted to for healing of the eyes.

² Presage of death.

the top of a millstone. [J. Spence, *Shet. Folklore* (1899), pp. 169 f.]

Some wells known as visited :—

Orkney.

Kildinguie, Stronsay. People of first rank from Denmark and Norway came here to drink the waters. [O.S.A. Orkney.]

Mr Hugh Marwick, in a letter of 28th Feb. 1944, quotes the legend 'that the dulse of Guiddin and the well of Kildinguie will cure any illness other than the Black Death';¹ and states that the well, pronounced Kildingy, is adjacent to an old chapel site, dedication unknown. See his note in *Pro. Ork. Antiq. Society*, V. 1.

Mans (= Magnus) *Well*, in Birsay, near Broadhouse.

Mary Well. At the edge of the beach near the old houses of Brough and about 200 yards west of the old Mary kirk, former parish church of Rousay.

No legends are known of these last two wells of which information was communicated by letter from Mr Hugh Marwick. [Ed.]

Shetland.

Helga Water. North Mavine, near Hillswick, was a holy loch, and according to Jakobsen, a place of pilgrimage.

Yelabrun, Hellabrun (Jakobsen), was a healing well.

Dates of visitation are no longer remembered; the most frequent times for pilgrimages were Easter and Lent.

¹ The mention of the Black Death reflects memories of this scourge when it swept over the north in the middle of the fourteenth century. [Ed.]

FAIRS

Comments on the difficulty of travel in visiting holy wells apply also to the hindrances in visiting fairs, and may be accentuated, since a boat bound for a fair was laden with live stock and merchandise ; and as the islanders were rather fisher folk than farmers the need of fairs was perhaps limited. [Ed.]

Orkney.

Birsay and Harry. Three fairs annually for cattle and horses. [N.S.A., Orkney.]

Kirkwall. Three fairs were held here annually, at Palm Sunday, Lammas and Martinmas ; of these only the Lammas fair survives. This was the great holiday of the year and the great horse market of Orkney. [*Pro. Ork. Antiq. Soc.*, I, p. 50.]

The *New Stat. Account* gives the first Tuesday after 11th August as the date of the first day of the fair, which continued for a fortnight.

In Kirkwall is an annual Lammas Fair, held for three days . . . where there is a great Rendezvous of the country people, who bring in black cattle for slaughter, coarse and fine Linnen, Stockings Blankets etc. for sale. [James Fea, *The present State of the Orkney Islands* (1775), republished 1884, p. 17.]

Here also is a market for beef, mutton, etc. from the month of August to November.

The great holiday of the year . . . in all Orkney was the Kirkwall Lammas market. . . . It was the great horse market of Orkney. [J. Spence, *Pro. Ork. Antiq. Soc.* I, p. 79.]

Kirkwall had three fairs, one at Palm Sunday, another at Lambmass and the third at Martinmas; but none of these are held except the Lambmass. [Rev. George Low, Minister of Orkney, 1774-1795. *Pro. Ork. Antiq. Soc.* I, p. 50.]

Saint Andrews. Cattle markets at Candlemas, Midsummer and Martinmas. [N.S.A. (1844).]

Sandwick. A cattle fair in June.

Stromness. One fair, beginning the first Tuesday in September.

Shetland.

Northmaving. Three fairs annually, for cows, calves and horses. 'Attended by great numbers from a great distance.'

Sandsting and Aisthing. Occasional sales of cattle and horses at Whitsuntide and Martinmas; 'at both seasons a number of people attend.'

SEASONS

SPRING

I. Names. Voar, and possibly Lang Reid was a name known in the north for part of spring, and may have referred to the time of dearth at that season when the harvest grain was at an end. [Ed.]

Long reed . . . (obs.), the month of March, a time of poverty because the winter's stocks were mostly eaten up by that time. An old rhyme says

After Yule comes dule—
Bere breed an' water-kail.

. . . Reed probably represents O.N. *hrith*-, No. *rid*, f. hard weather; a period of time, etc. and 'long reed' may thus be a parallel phrase to O.N. *langa festa*, f. lent.

Since the above note was written, I read a note on the term to the Orkney Antiquarian Society, which was published in the local Press. I asked further information on the term from anyone who had heard it, and a day or so later was favoured by a letter from Mrs Wishart in Orphir, who said her mother, a native of S. Ronaldsay, on being asked if she knew the term, promptly recited:

In Lentryne an' the Lang Reid
Naething bit water, kail an' bere breed.

The meaning of the term she did not know, but her father had been wont to recite the couplet to them when they turned up their noses at any food placed before them. [Hugh Marwick, *The Orkney Norn*, pp. 108 & 230.]

The term is quoted in the N.E.D. with one reference from the *Buke of the Howlat* (c. 1450) l. 698.

Syne all the lentryne but leis, and the lang reid,
And als in the adwent
The Soland Stewart was sent.

^o(Then all lent, without lying, and the long reid, and also in the advent the Solan goose was sent as steward.) [Ed.]

Mr W. W. Ratter sends the following note :

Until I began to look into the meaning of the 'Lang Reid' I did not realise how hard times must have been in the old days for our forefathers, and over the north of Europe. The old sayings of which we still have record show it. Take, for instance, the adage . . . that Jakobsen gives in his Shetland Dialect Dictionary : *daya lengi, mogi swengi*, meaning that as the day got longer, (in spring), the stomach got more hungry. Compare the Norwegian, *dagarne lengjast, magarne svengjast*, with the same meaning. Further south, we have reference to 'lentrin-kail', kail boiled by itself, without meat, and, I daresay, the poor people glad to get even that.

Lerwick, *Ap.* 1944.

II. Saying. The voar¹ night comes creeping through the moss ; the hairst² night comes galloping on a horse.

[Communicated by Mr William W. Ratter, 15th Sept. 1943.]
Shet.

III. Omen. The first lamb. When the first lamb of the season is white, the omen is fortunate, and the appearance of a black lamb is unlucky. [*N.S.A. Orkney*, p. 143.] Ork.

Early dropped lambs.

Early dropped lambs are no canny, and ominous of evil.
[*County Folklore*, III, p. 18.] Shet.

Second Sight.

Trial of Isobel Sinclair, 1683. It was alleged against her, that during seven years, 'sex times at the reathes of the year, shoe hath bein controlled with the Phairie ; and that be thame, shoe hath the *second sight* : quhairby shoe will know giff thair be any fey bodie in the hous.' [J. G. Dalyell. *The Darker Superstitions of Scotland*. (1835), p. 470.] Ork.

IV. Observances. Sealing.

In Spring, the most notable event to the Lerwigians is the arrival of the Greenland ships. These vessels rendezvous in the harbour for ten or twelve days, from the end of February or beginning of March, for the purpose of completing their crews for sealing. . . . They belong to various ports, chiefly Dundee and Peterhead. Their number is now from fifteen to twenty, but formerly was much larger. . . . The fleet leaves Lerwick about the 10th of March for the sealing ground around Jan Meyen, which it reaches in a week or ten days. . . . A sealing voyage generally occupies about six weeks. . . . Then

¹ voar, spring.

² hairst, harvest.

ships commonly proceed to the whaling at Davis Straits. . . . From such a voyage the vessels generally return in the month of October. [Robert Cowie, *Shetland*, etc. (1871), p. 130.]

Lerwick, Shet.

Games. Games played in spring were 'Barley', 'Roopie', 'Pookie', 'Plunkie' and marble games. These games all had times and seasons and the one ended and the other began according to a strange unwritten law. The editor has not been able to learn the names of games played at other seasons except of those played in the open air by adults. See also games at harvest, below. [Ed.]

SUMMER

IV. Observances. The Odin stone, long the favourite trying-place in summer twilights of Orkney lovers. [E. Gorrie, *Summers and Winters in the Orkneys*, p. 143.]

The Odin Stone was at Stennis, a stone with a round hole in it. It was customary, when promises were made, for the contracting parties to join hands through this hole, and the promises so made were called the promises of Odin. [*Archæologia Scotica*, I, p. 263.] See p. 39. Ork.

XII. Festivals. See July 29th, XII.

LATE SUMMER OR AUTUMN

IV. Observances. Riding the Hagra. Beating the Bounds. An annual custom not always observed at the same date, but usually in the late summer or the autumn.

There is an old Shetland expression : 'to ride de hagri'—'hagri' being an O.N. hag(a)reið : skattald-ride. In former times neighbouring proprietors used to ride in company around their skattald-boundaries in order to inspect the marches, or put up new march-stones, and thus prevent future disputes. Every year, when this was done, they took with them a boy, the son of some crofter, residing on one or other of the properties. At every march-stone they came to, the boy got a flogging ; this, it was thought, made him remember the place ever after. For every year this 'hagri' or skattald-riding was done, a different boy was selected to accompany the proprietors and receive the flogging. [Jessie M. E. Saxby, *Shet. Trad. Lore* (1932).] Shet.

The custom is now quite obsolete. [Jakobsen, *Dictionary* (1921).]

'Riding da hægries'¹ was a curious custom necessary in the days when no written deeds, no print, were available. At regular intervals—perhaps once a year—the owners of land rode round their scattald boundaries (which were mere stones set on end here and there) to see that these had not been altered or obliterated. They were accompanied by their serving-men and some tenants, and, notably, by a few small boys. These were probably 'greeting' sorely, for at every landmark a boy 'got a sair treshin sae as he sood mind well whaur da hægmetts stude.' Each season a different lot of boys had to undergo this discipline. So there was always someone living who could, by the memory of his floggings, tell accurately where the 'hægmetts' should be. [Gilbert Goudie, *Antiquities of Shet.* (1901), pp. 295 f.]

Beating the Bounds.

'Riding the Hægrie.' The heritors of a parish are said to 'ride the Hægrie'² when examining the scattald marches.—Edmondston, *Glossary*, s.v. [*County Folk-Lore*, III, p. 218.]

Tingwall, Whitnass, and Weisdale. Beating the Bounds. The Bailie, or chief magistrate, went along the marches, accompanied by some of the most respectable people of each parish, who were all well acquainted with the division, and

¹ The scattald was originally called *hagi* (O.N. = pasture, a hedged field), and riding the marches of the scattald or hagi continued to be called 'riding the hægries.' The scattald was a defined run of grazing land attached to a township, and used in common solely by the townfolk; it was quite separate from the hill land or commons proper.

The alteration of the name *hagi* into *scattald* evidently occurred in this way. In the report of the Royal Commission appointed in 1575 to inquire into the oppressions in Shetland, the terms scattald, scattland, and scathald are used as meaning the whole township—the cultivated land and its hagi, the district paying skatt. It is only in recent times that the term scattald is used in a restricted sense for the hagi or common grazing land of the township.—A.W.J.

Beyond the land appropriated and cultivated by the conqueror, or enclosed and reclaimed in later ages . . . there lay the almost unlimited waste of the hills and the unenclosed pasturage. To this waste, no one . . . could in equity lay an exclusive claim. This, then, was the *almening*, the common or skathald, vested in the sovereign as representing the community and for the freedom and use of which skat, or duty, was imposed upon every merk of occupied land having a natural claim to that privilege.

² O.N. *Hagi*, literally an enclosed place, pasture; in Scotland applied to the common pasture (now called scattald) attached to each township. This term 'riding the hægrie' preserves the original name now represented by scattald, which latter term formerly was applied to the whole township—cultivated land and common pasturage.—A. W. Johnston.

with them some young boys, on whom they bestowed a good flogging at particular places, in order that they might remember the Marches, after which they received some little reward. I have heard some old people who were present, describe what took place at these ridings of the marches, called 'riding the Hagra.' [*N.S.A., Shetland, p. 64.*] Shet.

I have heard this phrase applied only once. The old man who used it was humorous and blessed with a vivid imagination. He was telling me a very 'tall' story, and I think I smiled incredulously, for he said quickly, 'It's true at am tellin you, for I mind it weel—as weel as Auld Daa minded da hagrnets.' When I asked how his grandfather remembered the boundaries, he scratched his head and glanced knowingly 'oot o da tail o his ee,' and replied, 'Weel, ye see, Auld Daa wiz een o da boys at hed ta follow da lairds whan dey wir riding da hagrries.' As Auld Daa was probably an urchin about the middle of the eighteenth century, that custom must have been in vogue not more than one hundred and fifty years ago. When I pressed for further information about Auld Daa's unique juvenile experience, I was told that he 'gowled dat odious 'at da laird roared oot, "God save you, men, and gie da bairn a bit frae wir ferdienate ta stap his minn wi'". So dan een stikit a morsel itta Auld Daa's haund, bit he gowled on for au dat. Lang an last, da laird grippit him be da lug an says, "If du doesna had de sheeks I'se gie de a gude lunder upo da wrang side o de haffit." So dan he gowled nae mair, bit—what wi' ae thing an anidder—Auld Daa had kaishin to mind upa dat riding o da hagrries, yau, yau.' [*Jessie M. E. Saxby, Ork. & Shet. Miscell. Viking Club, I, pp. 269-270.*]

AUTUMN

IV. Harvest Observances. The Bikko. In Orkney in my childhood the harvest customs you mention still went on. There was some laughter over the last sheaf, and some attempt to avoid the job of tying it. More serious was the last load or sheaf to come into the stackyard. I have known young men almost at fists to avoid it. The last sheaf was the 'bitch'. When one farm had finished the 'leading-in' before its neighbour, the lads would make a she-dog of straw, and put it on the sly in some prominent position about the neighbour's steading, taking care not to be caught. It is strange and interesting that no one thought of asking the meaning of these customs.

'This', says Sir James Frazer, 'is the first case I have found of the last sheaf personified (so to say) as a bitch in the British Islands.' [Quoted from a letter by Sir Js. Frazer in *F-L*, XXX (1919), p. 131.] Ork.

Another old custom—now quite defunct I suppose—was associated with the bringing in of the crop in harvest. As the last few loads were being carted in there was tremendous 'kemping' or competition to avoid being the last to come in. A figure of straw was made in the shape of a dog or 'bikko' (bitch), as it was termed, and this was placed in the yard gate to salute the last comer. Everyone then in the yard began (evidently in derision) to bark at him as he entered with the last load. He was then presented by the mistress with a 'piece' to eat, after which everyone seemed to have a special licence to 'ball' him with clods. It would be highly interesting to know the origin of this most quaint custom. [Hugh Marwick, *Antiquarian notes on Sanday*. *Pro. Orkney Antiq. Soc.* I (1922-23), p. 28.] Sanday, Ork.

Little boys were, and I have no doubt are, as anxious to help 'herd' the corn as the grown-ups. Sometimes a little fellow, although only able to carry one sheaf would find himself struggling up the brae with the last sheaf of the crop. If he were the last into the yard he got a consolation of a piece of bread, either a piece of flour-bannock or a piece of oatmeal-brønnie, well spread with fresh butter; but he did not permit himself to be last except he could not help it. [Communicated by Mr William W. Ratter, 15th Sept. 1943.] Shet.

Game in the cornyard. It was the custom, when the corn was in the cornyard, for the bairns to chase each other, or dodge each other, out and in between the screws or ricks. This game was called 'skuttie-muttie', or 'skut-a-millie-scroo'. This would be in the old language, *skotta millum skrufa*, to run among the screws. [Communicated by Mr W. W. Ratter, Lerwick, 15th September, 1943.] Shet.

Rhyme of the farm kiln.

The cat sat at the kill-huggie spinning, spinning;
By came a peerie mouse rinning, rinning.
What's this du's spinning my lady, my lady?
Coat an' breeks to me son, fouse face, I'll hae dee, I'll hae dee!
[*Ibid.*] Shet.

Castin' the heuks. At harvest time the neighbours in a

'toon'¹ were wont to help one another with the shearing of the corn. When the last 'rig' was completed it was customary to *cast da heuks*. This was done by one individual taking hold of the various sickles by their points, and tossing them collectively backwards over the shoulder, at the same time repeating the following :

'Whaar 'ill I in winter dwell,
Whaar 'ill I in voar (spring) dell (delve),
Whaar 'ill I in simmer fare,
Whaar 'ill I in hairst shaer?'

The direction in which each person's sickle pointed was supposed to answer those queries, but if any one had stuck into the ground, that was taken as an indication that its owner was not destined to live very long. [John Nicholson, *Folk-Tales & Legends of Shetland* (1920), pp. 80, 81.] Shet.

Swinanness is considered too sacred to 'put speed intil', for there the sea-kings were wont to contend, and many bloody battles were fought there. A man chanced to delve a small bit of verdant turf in Swinanness, wherein he sowed corn in hopes of reaping a rich harvest; but when the corn grew up it was found that the stalks were filled with blood and the ears dropped salt tears in the place of tender dew. [Edmondston & Saxby, *The Home of a Naturalist* (1888), p. 224.]

Unst, Shet.

The Harvest Knot. A 'harvest knot' of oaten straw woven for the harvest and worn by the harvesters either in their 'bonnets' or their button-holes was seen by Miss Marian



MacNeill in Orkney, during the harvest of 1938. [M. M. Banks, *Folk-Lore*, Sept. 1939, p. 314.] Ork.

The end of the harvest. Papa Little is in St Magnus Bay. The Culdees had a settlement there, and it gets its name in

¹Toon, a tún, a farm or cultivated township.

contra-distinction to Papa Stour. . . . For some peculiar reason mice could not live there. People from the mainland knew this, and at the end of the harvest they brought earth from Papa Little. They sprinkled this soil beneath their corn stacks, and when this was done the mice did not injure the corn. [John Nicholson, *Folk-Tales & Legends of Shetland* (1920), p. 10.] Shet.

Annual offering to Broonie. In the yard near the stiggie¹ was often to be seen a small skroo² of corn, standing apart from the rest. This was the annual offering set apart to Broonie, a household deity, whose good services were thus secured, particularly in protecting the corn-yard and thatch roofs during the storms of winter. No article of clothing was ever devoted to this imaginary being.

When Broonie got a cloak or hood,
He did his master nae mair good.

[John Spence, *Shet. Folk-Lore*, pp. 174, 175.] Shet.

Ridges bleed. There is one day in harvest on which the more ignorant, especially in Rousa, say if any work the ridges will bleed (Aug. 24th). [J. Brand, *A brief Description of Orkney* (1701), p. 61.] Ork.

LITTLE SUMMER, END OF AUTUMN

VII. Natural phenomena. About the end of autumn, and before the winter has set in, there is looked for in Shetland³ a spell of fine weather known as the 'peerie summer'. It is in the peerie summer that the coming of the whales may most confidently be looked for. [Rev. A. Sandison in *Saga-Book of the Viking Club*, I, pp. 46, 47.] Shet.

Last Sunday.

I. Name. Winter Sunday.

IV. e. Flocks of *snaa fowl* (snow bunting) seen before Winter Sunday (the last Sunday of October), foretell the approach of a severe winter. [John Spence, *Shetland Folk-Lore* (1899), pp. 110-112.]

¹ Stile, O.N. *stigi*, a step ladder.

² corn-rick, O.N. *skróp*. [skróf].

³ And in Orkney.—A.W. I.

WINTER

IV. Observances. Marriage.

As a rule all marriages took place during the three winter months. [John Spence, *Shetland Folklore* (1899), p. 181.] Shet.

Marriages, which are chiefly contracted in the winter. . . . [S. Hibbert, *A Description of the Shet. Islands* (1822), p. 554.]

Ibid.

Games, riddles. *Guddiks* or riddles were favourite pastimes in the winter evenings ; one meant the cow, or milk in the cow, or a horn spoon, a kettle, millstones, an egg, etc.; there were also many games of forfeits or *Wads*. [John Spence, *Shetland Folklore*, p. 181.] Shet.

First winter moon. On the night when the first winter moon was visible, the lasses were used to 'rin about the *east-fast stane*.' Selecting a large stone that was firmly embedded in the ground, the performers would go round it three times with the sun, and three times against, at the same time repeating:

Winter, winter, new mune, welcome an' true mune,
Grant me da first wiss (wish) 'at I ax o' de.

(Here she would mention the name of her favoured wooer)·

If I ha'e claes frae de ta wear,
If I ha'e bairns ta de ta bear,
Dan next sight 'at I see o' de,
May dy face be ta me, and dy back ta de sea.

[John Nicholson, *Folk-Tales and Legends of Shetland* (1920), pp. 82, 83.] Shet.

Dancing and Singing. In Orkney and Shetland winter was a time of festivity from Scandinavian times. [J. Spence, *Shetland Folklore*, p. 189.] Ork. & Shet.

I. of Unst. Diversions obtain here only in winter and consist in dancing on some stated days about and after Christmas, when they meet in considerable numbers, men and women, and divert themselves in playing at cards etc. till the night is well spent. There is one species of dance which seems peculiar to themselves in which they do not proceed from one end of the floor to the other in a figure, nor is it in the manner of a Scotch reel, but a dozen or so form themselves into a circle, and taking each other by the hand, perform a sort of circular

dance, one of the company all the while singing a Norn Visick.¹ This was formerly their only dance, but has now given way to the reel. [George Low, *A Tour through Orkney & Schetland, in 1779* (1879), p. 163.] Cf. also New Year, below.

Visecks. It was not many years before...1774 that numerous songs, under the name of *visecks*, formed the accompaniment to dances that would amuse a festival party during a long winter's evening.... Then would a member of the happy sons and daughters of Hialtland take each other by the hand, and while one of them sang a Norn Viseck, they would perform a circular dance, their steps continually changing with the tune. [S. Hibbert, *A Description of the Shet. Isles* (reprint 1891), p. 259.] Shet.

Milling, the Nyogle and Trows. Milling in the watermills was in winter. These watermills are peculiar to Shetland. Sir Walter Scott writes that in his day there were five hundred such mills in operation in Shetland; no burn was without one. Each mill generally belonged to eight or ten crofters and were used in rotation. J. Nicholson describes them as of rough masonry and low-built turf roofs. At one end was a rough platform on which the mill-stones were placed. Above these was the hopper, suspended from the roof. The building consisted of an 'upper house' and an 'under house'. The latter contained the *tirl*, an upright barrel-shaped contrivance having slanting wooden blades. The tirl was connected with the upper millstone by means of an iron spindle, and was revolved by the water descending through a shoot underneath the mill. (*Folk-Tales, etc. of Shet.*, p. 58.)

Trows in the mills. The tiny water mills peculiar to Shetland were generally situated in some very secluded spot, and as corn grinding was usually done during the night, it followed that people frequently encountered the trows when at the mill. [John Nicholson, *Folk-Tales & Legends of Shetland* (1920), p. 11.]

The nyogle was not the creature of any particular season, but beliefs and tales most frequently associate his appearances with the water-mills, and owing to the late harvest these mills were in use after the autumn, so that the nyogle may be classified as a winter phenomenon. [Ed.]

The nyogle was a fabled animal corresponding to the Scottish *water-kelpie*. . . . In appearance it very much resembled a horse, although sometimes said to have a head like a human.

¹ Visick, a song.

PLATE I



Copyright Photo J D Rattar, Lemsick

A SHETLAND WATER MILL

Showing the wooden 'Shoot' that directs the water on to
the wings of the wheel

It was generally seen near lochs and burns, and also frequented meadows and wet marshy ground. . . . Should anyone mistake it for a horse and mount it that person was undone. It would instantly start off at a terrific speed, and rush for the nearest water, and there was no escape for the luckless rider, who was certain to be drowned.

The nyogle was a source of much trouble and annoyance to people grinding at the water mills. . . . He would get into the 'under hoose' and take hold of the tirl to stop it. [J. Nicholson, *Folk-Tales, etc.*, pp. 58, 59.] Shet.

The nyogle was regarded as a sprite that could change his form. He was called sometimes the *shoopiltie* or sea-boy, but he often appeared as a pony or horse. . . . When he stopped the grinding in the mill the proper thing to do to scare him away was to drop a burning peat down into the under house. . . . Another idea about him was that he went about the common in the form of a horse, and that if any one mounted him he then made for the nearest water with the intention of drowning his rider. Sometimes he would go over the cliffs into the sea in a blue flame, or 'blue lowe' to use the popular expression. [Communicated by Mr W. W. Ratter of Lerwick, Sept.-Oct. 1943.] Shet.

Burstin offered to the nyogle. Burstin (corn dried in a kettle over the fire) was offered to the Water Neugle in order to insure his good services. If this was neglected he would sometimes grasp the *tirl* and stop the mill and could only be dislodged by dropping a firebrand down by the lightnin' tree. [John Spence, *Shetland Folklore* (1899), p. 174.] Shet.

Another description of the nyogle. The *nuggle* or *shoopiltee* had the 'outward form of a Shetland pony, except that instead of a tail he has some sort of wheel appendage . . . carefully concealed from the observer. He has a knack of entrapping passers-by to take a ride on him. No sooner is he mounted than he makes into the nearest loch and endeavours to drown his rider. He is also given to stopping mills.' [T. R. Tudor, *The Orkneys & Shetland* (1883), p. 169.]

The Brownie. The Brownie is helpful. In popular superstition the imp or demon, Brownie, often got the credit of supplying the corn to the 'eye' of the upper millstone in the absence of the owner, who would leave the mill temporarily to its own guidance; when he has estimated the requisite supply of corn in the hopper for a given time of grinding, returning to regulate it with a fresh supply. [Gilbert Goudie, *Antiquities of Shet.* (1904), p. 248.] Shet.

This water-mill is said to resemble those used in Scandinavia as noted in 1874. Mr G. Goudie believes it was once used in Orkney, also in Caithness and Sutherland ; he knows mills very similar used in Harris and Mull. Mills in the Faroe Isles are almost identical, and in Ireland these mills were called Danish Milns (mentioned 1698). They were known in Sweden, not in Denmark. [*Ibid.* pp. 265-277.]

Disappearance of fairies, trows, etc. There are still some who have seen and can tell wondrous stories of the fairies before the gaugers put them to flight by their odious tax upon the generous liquor which was required to warm and expand the heart ere those airy inhabitants condescended to reveal themselves to the eyes of man. [G. & P. Anderson, *Guide to the Highlands*³ (1851), p. 682.]

MOVABLE FESTIVALS

FASTERN'S E'EN

I. Names. Shrovetide, Fastern's E'en, Brose Day. . . . This day was called Milk Gruel Night in Harra. [A. W. Johnston, *Ork. & Shet. Miscell.* Viking Club, I, 297.]

II. Rhymes, sayings. The last festival of winter was Fastern's E'en, a movable feast, about the beginning of February.

First comes Candlemas,
An' dan da new mön,
An' dan comes Fastern's E'en
Whin a' da guid is done.

[J. Spence, *Shet. Folk-Lore* (1899), p. 199.]

Shet.

Another version:

First hid comes Candlemas day
An' than the new mune ;
An' than hit comes Brose day
If hit was ever so sune ;
An' than there's forty days
Atween Brose day an' Pase day,
The forty days o' lent.

[Hugh Marwick, *Dictionary*.]

V. i. Visiting churches, etc., chiefly at Lent and Easter. There was formerly a church at Weesdale dedicated to 'Our Lady'. It was much (sometimes still is) frequented by people from every corner of Shetland, who, by casting in an offering of money at the shrine of 'Our Lady', believed they would be delivered from any trouble they laboured under. There is a tradition regarding the building of it, still firmly believed by the superstitious of the islanders. Two wealthy ladies, sisters, having encountered a storm off the coast of Shetland, vowed to 'Our Lady', that, if she would bring them safe to land, they would erect a church to her on the first spot they reached. They landed at Weesdale, and immediately commenced building the church. And each morning, when the masons

came to work, they found as many stones ready quarried as they required during the day. One of the elders of the church, who lately lived in that neighbourhood, used regularly to gather up the offerings, which he put into the poor's box. [*N.S.A.*, p. 69.] Shet.

Pilgrimages to chapels. On the northern part of that parish there is in the sea a natural rock where men ascend to the top on hands and knees with very great difficulty. There is a chapel there which is called the Bairns of Brugh. Hither out of various islands innumerable men, boys, youths, old men, servants, flock together; but being come, with naked feet, as I formerly said, praying, they ascend, where none except one can come to the chapel at one time; there is there a fountain pure and sparkling, which indeed is wonderful: there the men, with bended knees and clasped hands, distrusting that there is a God, supplicate (the Bairns of Brugh) with many incantations, throwing stones and water behind their backs, and walking twice or thrice round the chapel. Having finished their prayers they return home affirming that they have performed their vows. [Translation from the Latin in Macfarlane's *Geographical Collections*, III.]

Deerness, Ork.

Unst, Shetland. Cross Kirk.—Cross Kirk, or St Cruz, is still accounted a holy place, and occasional pilgrimages are made to it by some of the older inhabitants. [*N.S.A.*, Shetland, p. 40.]

Some of its virtues were believed to extend even to the shell snails which sheltered in its mouldering walls. The poor Creatures were collected, dried, powdered, and prescribed as a remedy for jaundice. [R. Cowie, *Shetland, etc.*³ (1879), p. 258.]

Mr *Hercules Sinclair*, Minister, . . . in his Zeal, against superstition, rased *Cross Kirk*, in this Parish; Because the People superstitiously frequented it: And when demolished, behind the place where the Altar stood, and also beneath the Pulpit, were found several pieces of Silver in various shapes, brought thither as offerings by afflicted People, some being in the form of a Head, others of an Arm, others of a Foot, accordingly as the offerers were distressed in these parts of the Body.—[BRAND, p. 95. *County Folk-Lore*, III, p. 10.] Shet.

Crosskirk.—The superstitious Commons of old used to frequent [this] in the silence of the night, each carrying their candles with them, and there feasted, and sported until day,

but this Superstitious Custome is now banished. [SIBBALD, p. 72. *Ibid*, p. 195.] Shet.

The church in this island is dedicated to the Virgin Mary, to which pregnant women oftentimes go on pilgrimage. . . . Here are sterile women,¹ and if they become pregnant, they never bring forth with life. [Jo. Ben, apud Barry, p. 443. Translation from the Latin in Macfarlane, *Geogr. Collections*, III ; the Scottish History Society's Publications (1908).]

Damsay, Ork.

Note, Jo Ben's *Description of Orkney*, dated 1529, could not have been written before 1582 ; see *Ork. & Shet. Miscell.* (Viking Club) I, p. 300. A. W. Johnston.

The Church of Wisdale . . . is much frequented by the Superstitious Country People, who light Candles therein, drop Money in and about it, go on their bare knees round it, and to which in their Straits and Sickness they have their Recourse, yea, some are so silly as to think, that if they be in any distress, tho not at this Church, yet if they turn their faces to it, God will hear them. One of the Justices told us, that tho they have laid out themselves to get these Superstitious Conceits Eradicated, yet they cannot get it altogether effectuated, but still they continue among the People. A Minister also told me, that it was much frequented by Women, who when they desire to Marry, went to this Church making their Vows and saying their Prayers there, so assuring themselves, that God would cause Men come in suit of them ; But this is not now so much in use as formerly. [Rev. J. Brand, *New Descripⁿ of Orkney, etc.* p. 92.] Cf. Black, *Orkney and Shetland Islands*.

Shet.

Westray. *St Tredwell's Chapel.* These Chappels² the people frequent, as for other ends, so for Prayer, they placing a kind of Merit therein, when performed in such places, and this they observe more than private Retirements ; and if they be under any Sickness, or in any danger, as at Sea, they will vow so to do. And when they go to the Chappels to pay the Vows taken on, they use to lay several Stones, one above another, according to the number of Vows which they made ; some of which heaps we saw in St Tredwell's Chappel. And none must go empty handed, but leave behind them some-

¹ For connection of sterility with eyebrows referred to in this passage in the Latin Version, see *Folk-Lore*, XLVII (1936), p. 397.

² That is, the numerous chapels, mostly now in ruins, scattered over the islands and belonging to pre-Reformation times.

thing, either a peice of Money, or of Bread, or a Stone, which they judge will be sufficient. [*Ibid.*, p. 59.]

[Brand further observes that it is especially during Lent, and more particularly on Easter Sunday, that these vows and devotions are observed. P. 60.]

Such was the veneration entertained by the inhabitants for this ancient Saint, that it was with difficulty that the first Presbyterian minister of the parish could restrain them, of a Sunday morning, from paying their devotions at this ruin, previous to their attendance on public worship in the reformed church. Wonders, in the way of cure of bodily disease, are said to have been wrought by this Saint, whose fame is now passed away, and name almost forgotten. [*N.S.A.*, Orkney, p. 117.] Ork.

Cf. Black, p. 6 ; also Wells, above

With Stones. St Tredwell's Loch, resorted [to] for sore eyes at Easter and during Lent. It was circuited in silence, the parts affected were washed, and old clouts were left. When they come . . . to St Tredwell's Chapel they leave behind either a piece of money, or of bread, or a stone, and lay stones one above another according to the numbers of vows taken. [For St Tredwell, see *Scottish Calendar Customs*. III, Oct. 8. Triduana.] Ork.

An old name for the week before Easter in Shetland was *dumbvidlavoga*, O.N. *dymbildagavika*. Mr W. W. Ratter writes : ' this is really dumb-bell-day week, a time when the bells were muffled, or rather rung with a wooden tongue.' (2nd May 1944.) Shet.

XI. Shrovetide Football. In his letter to you of February 24 Mr Maxwell states that nowhere else in Scotland (apart from the Border towns) is this game indulged in. The game is played, on exactly the same lines, in Kirkwall, Orkney, on New Year's Day, the ' competing teams ' being the ' Up-the-Gates ' and the ' Down-the-Gates '.—Mr. A. J. Swanson, 7, Drapers'-gardens, E.C.2. [*The Times*, Feb. 1928.]

EASTER

I. Names. Pasch, Paes.

V. b. Rolling *paes* (Pasch)-eggs. We had the custom in Shetland of collecting ' Paes-eggs ' boiling them hard, and taking them to the hill to be eaten. I remember taking part in this, but only once. I remember we rolled the eggs down

a grassy slope before eating them. I suppose this custom has died out now ; I never hear of it. [Communicated by Mr W. W. Ratter, 31st March, 1944.] Shet.

XIII. Business transactions. Pasch Sunday was a legal term day in Shetland. [*Pro. Soc. Antiq. Scot.* X, p. 716.] Shet.

THE CALENDAR

NEW YEAR'S EVE

V. 1. & IX. Singing, with begging.

The following New Year's Eve songs from the Orkney and Shetland Islands are of a different character from the Scottish Hogmanay songs and rhymes. Some were accompanied with acting, as explained in notes, and a few tags from the mainland *ranns* appear here and there; comparison with quotations in *Scottish Calendar Customs* should be made. With the milder begging there will be noticed at times the threatening tone known throughout Europe.

[Ed.]

V. 1. m. New Year's Eve Songs.

ACCOUNT OF THE NEW YEAR SONG AS SUNG IN SANDAY

[The following is copied from a note-book of the late Mr George Petrie, preserved in the Library of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. It is there said to have been taken 'from a manuscript book belonging to the late Dr Wood, Kirkwall', and seems to have been written down sometime about 1836.]

Among the amusements in Sanday, as well as in some other of the Orkney Islands, during the Christmas holidays (*Scottice* Daft Days) is the singing of the New Year's Song.

On the last night of the year (old style) the Hogmanay of Scotland and New Year's even of Orkney, young men, residing in the same district, collect in bands of from half-a-dozen to a score for the purpose of singing this song. The singers do not go out in *guises*, although that too would form a part of the amusements at the time the singing was introduced; but I have never heard the word *Gyseard* or *guiseard* used in Orkney. When the company is collected they repair to one of the principal houses in the district and commence singing at the door. When the song is finished the door is opened by the inmates of the house; the singers are taken in and regaled with bread and cheese and a cogue of ale; they then peaceably leave the house, and proceed to serenade another and another till

they have visited all the principal houses of the district or parish.

Although many, or I may say most, of the band are often what is termed *timmer-tuned*, yet the effect is very far from being unpleasant, especially when it is recollected that this is a remnant of an ancient and harmless pastime which is now fast wearing away.

The music is simple, and consists, like many of our old Scottish tunes, of only one part. The words, too, are simple and homely. The whole is undoubtedly a composition of the time of the lovely and amiable but unfortunate Queen Mary. Several of the words in the song are now obsolete in Orkney, or at least are never used in conversation but by very old people.

The following copy of the song is a corrected one from several editions repeated to me by natives of Sanday, North Ronaldshay, Westray, Egilshay, and the Mainland. They differed only in trifling particulars, such as the arrangement of the verses, or the lengthening of one line by the addition of a useless word, or the shortening of another line by the omission of a necessary word. Slight differences must occur in the several editions of anything trusted wholly to the care of tradition, as has been the case with

THE NEW YEAR'S SONG

MUSIC OF THE NEW YEAR'S SONG



I.

This nycht it is guid New Year's Ev'n's nycht,
We are a' Queen Marie's men ;
 We've come here to claim our rycht,
An' that's before Our Laddie !

[The refrain forms the second and fourth lines of each succeeding verse.]

2.

Its O ! be it rycht, or be it wrang,
We sall hae't afore we gang.

3.

King Henrie 's knit us in a ring,
He sent us out this sang to sing.

4.

We're a' come frae King Henrie's house,
And he 's no hame nor yet his spouse.

5.

The Queen she wears upon her crown
Fine silk ribbons—they're fu' brown.

6.

The Queen wears on her waist sae sma'
Fine silk stays—an' they're fu' braw.

7.

The Queen wears on her legs sae lack,
Fine silk hosen—they're fu' black.

8.

The Queen wears on her bonny feet
American leather ¹—an' that fu' neat.

9.

Guid hour upon this buirdly biggan ;
Frae the steethe stane to the riggin !

10.

We wish monie stacks aboon your style,
Some for maut, and some for meal.

11.

Thrive weel a' your owsen an' kye
Monie to sell, an' few to buy.

¹ When I first heard the song recited, a thought struck me that perhaps America had usurped the place of Morocco, as I had never heard the New World famed for the manufacture of leather ; all those however who repeated the song to me maintained that it was American leather, and I was forced to rest content. Sir Walter Scott has now put me to rights. In the romance of Ivanhoe, Prince John is made to appear at the passage of arms at Ashby-de-la-Zouche, with Maroquin boots. The verse should therefore stand—The Maroquin leather, &c.

12.

Thrive a' your horse upon the hill,
An' ilka mare wi' a staig foal.

13.

Thrive a' your flock, baith yowe an' ram
An' ilka yowe wi' a yowe lamb.

14.

Thrive a' your swine weel i' your styne
Wi' monie a gryce to rin thereby.

15.

We wish a' your geese weel to thrive
An' ilka goose wi' three times five.

16.

We wish a' your hens to thrive weel,
An' ilka hen twal at her heel.

17.

O ! here we hae our Tullietan,
It's for the use o' the Gudeman.

18.

O ! here we hae our little knife,
It's for the use o' the Gudewyfe.

19.

Gudeman gae to your bacon vat,
An' cut us out a daghan o' that.

20.

O ! cut it muckle ! cut it room !
Tak tent ye cutna yere big thumb.

21.

Gudewyfe gae to your kebbock creel,
See that you wyle your kebbocks weel.

22.

Gudewyfe gae to your butter ark[!]
An' weigh us oot o' it ten mark.

23.

O ! weigh ten mark an' ten pund,
See that you grup weel to the grund.

24.

Gudewyfe gae to your geelin' vat,
An' draw us off a skeal o' that.

25.

O ! draw us ane, draw us twa,
An' we'se be merrie or we gae' wa'.

26.

O ! draw us twa, draw us three,
An' aye the merrier we will be.

27.

Here we hae our carryin' horse,¹
An' monie a vengeance on his corse.

28.

For he wad eat far mair meat,
Than a' that we can gather an' get.

29.

An' he wad drink far mair drink,
Than a' that in his wame can swink.

30.

Our shoon are made of mare's skin,
Our feet, they're cauld, we wad be in.

31.

Open the door ! we maun be in,
To keep us out is surely sin.

32.

But gif you dinna open the door,
We'll ding it owre upon your floor.

33.

And now our sang is at a close
Whaur is the cogue ! It's at your nose.

[*Orkney and Shetland Miscellany*, Viking Club, I, pp. 262-266.]
Ork. and Shet.

¹ See p. 33, ll. 21-24.

New Year's Eve Song, with some acting

Taken down at Longhope in 1893 from William Corrigan,
of Stonequoy, North Walls.

This is our gude New Year's even's night,
We're a' Queen Mary's men
And we come here to crave our right
And that's before Our Lady.
And thats for every blithe bird's ¹ sake
That ever was born of Mary.

The second, fourth, fifth and sixth lines are repeated in each verse.

We're a' been at King Henry's house,
He's neither home nor yet his spouse.

King Henry's to (or, He has to) the green wood gone (or gane)
I'm sure he has not gone him lone (or, has no gane him lane).

At home he has a fair daughter
And fair may for her fair foster (pron. fosterer, or, fore-foster.)

She wears upon her bonnie head
The towers of gold and ribbons red.

She wears about her bonnie neck (pron. nake)
The lammer ² beads they are so neat (pron. nate).

She wears upon her bonnie breast-bone
The lacer (lace) that laces many a one.

She wears about her bonnie middle (or, jimp ³ middle)
The bonnie silken girtlet girdle.

She wears upon her legs so lack (see intensive form 'slack'
in old senses)
The silken stockings they are so black.

She wears upon her bonnie feet
The high-heeled shoon (or, Morocco slippers, or, leather shoon)
they are so sneat (or, neat).

(evidently something missing here).

Gudeman rise up and be na sweer
And handsel (or, to handsel) us on this New Year.

Gudeman gang tae yer ale-barrél
And hand us here o' that a scale (or skail).

¹ Bride's. ² Amber. ³ Slender.

And if yer scales they be but sma,
Never hain but gie us twa.

Gudeman gang tae your leaking vat
And hand us here a chunck o' that (or pink o' that.)

(There is some acting while singing this and the next seven or eight stanzas.)

Gudewife rise up and be na sweer,
And (or, To) handsel us on this New Year.

Gudewife gang tae yer kebbuck creel,
(And) wale yer kebbucks and wale them weel
(or, And see ye wale your kebbucks weel).

And if yer kebbucks be but sma'
Never (ye) hain but gie us twa.

(Oh !) cut them roun' and cut them soun'
Tak care ye dinna cut yer thoom
(Or, See that ye dinna cut yer thomb).

(This is only sung if slices of cheese are offered instead of a whole one.)

See here we've gotten a carriage horse,
The muckle Deil light on his corse.

(The 'carriage horse' is here pushed round and shown off.)

For he eaten far more meat
Than *me an'* my men can gather and get.

(Or, For he would eat more bread and meat
Than I and my men can gather and get.)

And he wad drucken far more drink
Than me and my men can carry and swink.

(Or,

And he would drink and stow more drink
Than I and my men can carry and drink.)

We have a wedding for to mak'
And we have neither meal nor maut.

We've two gude stacks abune the biel', (or, hill, or, stye.)
The one for maut and t'other for meal.

(Or,

One for malt and the other for meal).

We have ships sailing on the sea,
And mariners to set them free.

(Or,

to sail them free ; i.e. sailors free).

We have owsen of our ain kye
Plenty to sell and nane to buy.

We've twa gude gaults into the stye.
And many a gude ane rinning thereby.

(Or,

And many a gude gryce runs thereby,

Or,

And mony a gude hen runs thereby.)

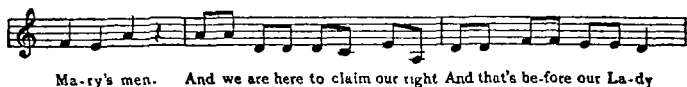
The lassie wi' the yellow hair
If we get her we'll seek nae mair.

(A rather free stanza comes sometimes in here, and there are a few rather foolish or senseless variations.)

The lassie she has apples three,
(Or, Our Lady she has apples three)
Ane to smell and ane to pree,
The third ans garred her dicht her e'e
And that 's before Our Lady.

A few words have been struck out which were evidently redundant, and one or two have been transposed for sake of the rhyme, evidently having fallen out of place accidentally. There is clearly a blank after stanza 10, and probably again after 26, nor does the end seem well finished. The reciter disclaimed knowing any more, and I did not press him at the time, as I understood some verses occasionally sung were said to be somewhat azure-hued. 'Scale' in stanza 12, etc. means *measure*. . . . There is evidently something corrupt at 'fair foster', etc.

The music, so far as it can be got on the piano, is as follows : there are some curious notes in third and fourth bars which cannot be played on the piano.



Ork

[J. G. Moodie Heddle, in *Saga-Book* of the Viking Club, II, pp. 37-42.]

New Year's Eve Song (As sung in Stromness)

Music communicated by Miss A. Johnston, Orphir.

Words communicated by Miss A. Spence, Stromness.



1.

Grace be to this buirdly biggin'
We're a' Queen Mary's men ;
From the steethe unto the riggin'
And that's before Our Lady.

[The refrain forms the second and fourth lines of each verse.]

2.

This is guid New Year's even's nicht,
And we've come here to claim our richt.

3.

The morrow is guid New Year's Day,
And we've come here to sport and play.

4.

The hindmost hoose that we cam from,
We're a' Queen Mary's men ;
We got oat-cake and sowen scone,
The three lugged cog was standin' fou,
We hope to get the same from you,
And that's before Our Lady.

5.

Guid wife gae to your kebbock creel
An' see thou count the kebbocks weel.

6.

Guid wife gae to your geling vat
We're a' Queen Mary's men ;
An' let us drink till our lugs crack,
An' fetch us ane an' fetch us twa,
An' aye the merrier we'll gang awa,
An' that's before Our Lady.

7.

Guid wife gae to your butter ark,
We're a' Queen Mary's men ;
An' fetch us here ten bismar's mark,
See that ye grip weel in the dark,
An' that's before Our Lady.

8.

May a' your mares be weel to foal,
An' every ane be a staig foal.

9.

May a' your kye be weel to calve,
An' every ane a quoyock calf.

10.

May a' your yowes be weel to lamb,
An' every ane a yow an' a ram.

11.

May a' your hens rin in a reel,
An' every ane twal at her heel.

12.

Here we hae brocht our carrying horse,
 We're a' Queen Mary's men ;
 An' mony a curse licht on his corse,
 He'll eat mair meat than we can get,
 He'll drink mair drink than we can swink,
 An' that's before Our Lady.

The above are the words and music as performed some forty years ago ; at present they are sung somewhat differently. The gradual change in words and music is an important point to note. Verses 4, 6, 7 and 12 appear to be in each case three verses run into one, possibly to save the repetition of the refrain.

[*Old-Lore Miscellany of Orkney* etc., Viking Club, II, pp. 136, 137.] Stromness, Ork.

New Year's Even Song

Peace be to this buirdly ¹ biggin' !
 We're a' Queen Mary's men,
 From the stethe unto the riggin',
 And that's before our Lady.

[*The second and last lines repeated in each verse.*]

This is gude New Year's even nicht—
 An' we've come here to claim our richt,
 The morrow is gude New Year's day—
 An' we've come here to sport and play
 The hindmost house that we came from—
 We gat oat-cake and sowens' scone ;
 The three-lugged cog was standing fou ;
 We hope to get the same from you.
 Gudewife gae to your kebbock-creel—
 And see thou count the kebbocks weel.
 Gudewife gae to your gealding-vat—
 An' let us drink till our lugs crack,
 An' fetch us ane an' fetch us twa,
 An' aye the merrier we'll gang awa',
 Gudewife gae to your butter-ark— ²
 An' fetch us here ten bismar mark ³ ;
 See that ye grip weel in the dark.

¹ Well-made, E.D.D.

² O. N. *Ork*, chest.

³ i.e. ten marks weighed on the bismar, O. N. *bismari*, steelyard.

May a' your mares be weel to foal—
And every ane be a staig foal,

May a' your kye be weel to calve—
And every ane a queyock calf,¹

May a' your ewes be weel to lamb—
And every ane a cwe and a ram,

May a' your hens rin in a reel—
And every ane twal at her heel,

Here we hae brocht our carrying-horse—
A mony a curse licht on his corse ;

He'll eat mair meat than we can get ;
He'll drink mair drink than we can swink.

It was the custom for companies of men to go from house to house on New Year's Eve singing in full chorus the [above] song.

At the conclusion of the song the minstrels were entertained with cakes and ale, and sometimes a smoked goose was set before the company. The singing-men at starting were few in number, but every house visited sent forth fresh relays, and the chorus waxed in volume as the number of voices increased. . . . The 'carrying-horse', mentioned in the last verse, was the clown or jester of the party, who suffered himself to be beaten with knotted handkerchiefs, and received double rations as the reward of his folly. [Dan Gorrie, *Summers and Winters in the Orkneys* (1867), pp. 52 ff, quoted in *County Folk-Lore* III, 253-255.] Notes by A. W. Johnston.

Ork.

Another version from the parish of Deerness, differing slightly from the above, is given by Chambers, in his *Popular Rhymes of Scotland*. He states that the song had been placed before him 'in a form not the most satisfactory to an antiquary, but the best that circumstances admitted of—namely, with a number of verses composed as much from imagination as from memory, to make out something like the whole piece'. On the conclusion of the song, Chambers adds : 'The inner door being opened, a tremendous rush took place towards the interior. The inmates furnished a long table with all sorts of homely fare, and a hearty feast took place, followed by copious libations of ale, charged with all sorts of good wishes. The party would then proceed to the next house, where a similar

¹ D. N. *kviga*, a young cow.

scene would be enacted. . . . No slight could be more keenly felt by a Deerness farmer than to have his house passed over unvisited by the New-year singers.' [Chambers, 4, pp. 167-169] ; [*County Folk-Lore*, III, pp. 255-256.] Ork.

The following . . . song I took down from the lips of a girl here (Stromness) in January last. It is doggerel in parts, but I give it as I heard it :

This is good New Year's evening night,
We've all come here to claim our right,
Dance before our Lady,
Dance before Prince Albert's sight,
We sing our song so clearly.

Prince Albert, he is not at home,
He is to the greenwood gone,
Courting a lady and bringing her home,
And that's ¹ before our Lady,
And that's before Prince Albert's sight,
We sing our song so clearly.

Get up, old wife, and shake your feathers ;
Dinna think that we are beggars ;
We are children come from home,
Seeking our Hogmanay.
That's before Prince Albert's sight,
And that's before a lady.

Gie's the lass wi' bonnie broon hair,
Or we'll knock yer door upon the floor ;
That's before Prince Albert's sight,
That's before a lady.

The children go round the table,
With their pockets full of money
And their barrels full of beer.
Do you wish to remind us A Happy New Year?
Me feet's cold, me shaes are thin ;
Gie me a halfpenny, an' let me rin.

[*N. & Q.*, 10th S, XI, p. 5.]

Ork.

The line in the modern version of this song as sung in Stromness,

' Get up, old wife, and shake your feathers '

¹ A bow.

(see 'Eng. Dial. Dict', *s.v.* feather—to steer one's feathers, to bestir oneself), does not occur in an old version from the same place, which will be printed, with music, in the April number of *The Orkney, Shetland, and Caithness Miscellany* of the Viking Club. It, however, occurs in another modern MS. version in my possession as

'Rise up, guid wife, and shake your feathers.'

In the Walls, 1893, version (Sagabook of the Viking Club, vol. II, p. 40) it is rendered :

'Gude wife, rise up, and be na sweer.'

Sweer means lazy : the same idea.

The lines

'Gie's the lass wi' bonnie broon hair,
Or we'll knock your door upon the floor,'

are not in the old version, but are found in the Walls version as

'The lassie wi' the yellow hair,
If we get her we'll seek nae mair,'

followed by 'a rather free stanza' which is not recorded. But in the Sanday, 1836, version (*Orkney and Shetland Miscellany*, I, p. 266) we have :

'Open the door ! we maun be in,
We are a' Queen Marie's men,
To keep us out is surely sin,
An' that's before Our Leddie !
But gif you dinna open the door, &c.
We'll ding it owre upon your floor, &c.'

In the latter case there is no mention of a lassie. [A. W. Johnston, *N. & Q.*, 10th S., XI, p. 177]. Ork.

The following are the words of the 'New'r Even's Song' as remembered by an old dame in Shetland :

'Gude new'r even, gude new'r night—St Mary's men are we ;
We're come here to crave our right—before our leddie.'

('before our leddie' repeated after each couplet.)

'King Henry he's a huntin' gane,—St Mary's men are we,
And ta'en wi' him his merry young men. . . .

'I'll tell ye how our lady was dressed,—St Mary's men are
we,—

If ye'll gie tae us some o' yer best. . . .

'She had upon her well-made head—St Mary's men are we—
A crown of gold, an' it fu' braid. . . .

'She had upon her middle sma'—St Mary's men are we—
A silver belt an' it fu' bra'. . . .

'She had upon her fingers ten—St Mary's men are we—
Rings o' gold, fu' mony an ane. . . .

'She had upon her weel-made feet—St Mary's men are we—
Silver slippers, an' they fu' neat. . . .

'Gude man, gang in your gauin-geel—St Mary's men are
we—
An' gie's a can or two o' ale. . . .

'Gude wife, gang in your butter-kit—St Mary's men are we—
An' gie's a spoon or two o' it. . . .

'Likewise gang in your farrel-creel—St Mary's men are we—
An' wale your farrels, an' wale them weel. . . .

'Our spoon is made o' cow's horn,—St Mary's men are we—
Open da door, an' let us in. . . .

'We're standing here before da door,—St Mary's men are
we—
An' we'll pass in before a score. . . .'

[*County Folk-Lore*, III, pp. 256-257.]

Shet.

In the olden time, on the last night of the old year, five young lads, consisting of a 'gentleman', a 'carrying horse', and three others, all disguised, went from house to house, singing what was called the 'New'r Even's Song' and collecting provisions for a banquet on New Year's night. The 'gentleman' wore a cap made of straw, with his name lettered on the front, a collar of straw round his neck, a belt of straw round his right arm. It was his duty to sing, which he did, standing outside the door; and when the song was finished, if invited, he would enter the house and introduce himself as Vanderigan come from Drontheim, pronounced Dornton. [*County Folk-Lore*, III, p. 204.]

Shet.

THE DAY DAWN

An ancient Scandinavian air preserved in Shetland, set by Miss Kemp of Edinburgh]



[Hibbert, *Shetland*, p. 608 ; County Folk-Lore, III, 252-253.]
Shet.

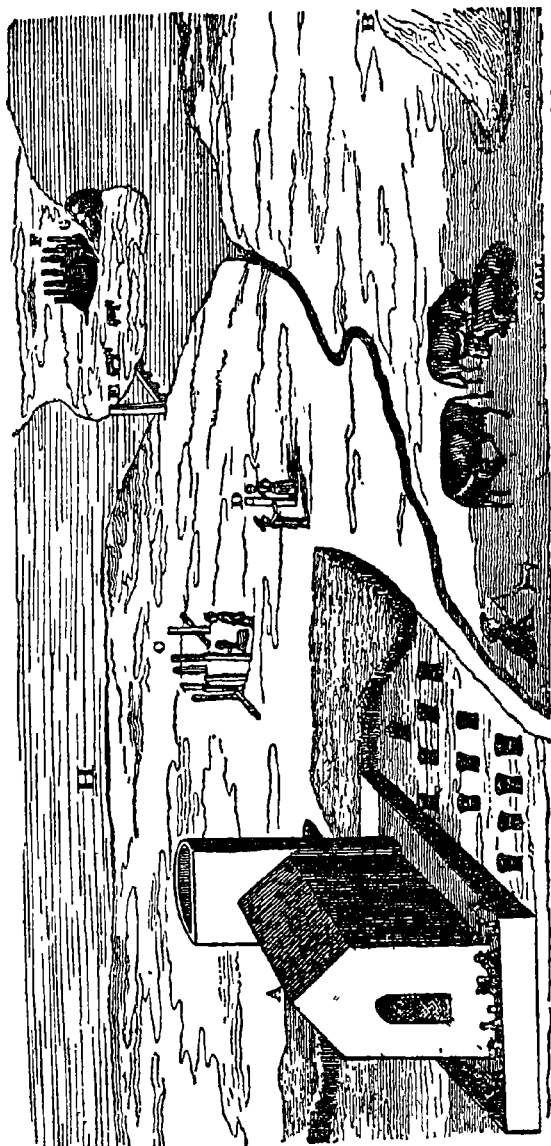
V. i. Visiting Stones, altars, etc. ; (for wells see separate Section).

Here (N. Ronaldshay, Ork.) a monumental stone stands in the middle of a plain, ten feet high and four broad. . . . Around it, on the first day of the New Year, the inhabitants sometimes assemble for their amusement, and indulge for a while in the song and the dance. [Rev. G. Barry, *Hist. of the Orkney Islands* (1805) p. 57.] Ork.

(After mention of this stone) No tradition is preserved concerning it . . . The writer of this has seen 50 of the inhabitants assembled there on the first day of the year and dancing with moonlight, with no other music than their own singing. [Hugh Marwick. *The Place-Names of North Ronaldshay*. Pro. Ork. Antiq. Soc., I, p. 23.] Ork.

This meeting [at Stennis] gave the young people an opportunity of seeing each other, which seldom failed in making four or five marriages every year ; and to secure each other's love, till an opportunity of celebrating their nuptials, they had resource to the following solemn engagements :—The parties agreed stole from the rest of their companions, and went to the Temple of the Moon, where the woman, in presence of the man, fell down on her knees and prayed the god Wodden (for such was the name of the god they addressed upon this occasion) that he would enable her to perform all the promises and obligations she had and was to make to the young man present, after which they both went to the Temple of the Sun, where the man prayed in like manner before the woman, then they repaired from this to the stone marked D, and the man being on one side and the woman on the other, they took hold of each other's right hand through the hole, and there swore to be constant and faithful to each other. This ceremony was held so very sacred in those times that the person who dared to break the engagement made here was counted infamous, and excluded all society. [G. Low, *Tour through the islands of Ork. & Schet.* (1879), p. xxvi, quoted in *County Folk-Lore*, III, pp. 212-213.] Ork.

The sacredness of the vow (taken with joining hands through the perforated stone of Odin at Stennis) was recognised by the church courts. . . . Principal Gordon of the Scots College of Paris, who visited Orkney in 1781, relates that about twenty years previously the elders of the Kirk Session of Sandwick were particularly severe on a young man brought before them for seduction on account of his having broken 'the promise of Odin'. [Rev. Ch. Rogers, *Social Life in Scot.*



A. The old church of Stennis.

B. Maeshowe.

C. Ring of Stennis, called 'the Temple of the Moon', where the 'rites of Odin' were celebrated.

D. 'Stone of Odin', used for the solemnization of contracts, which is indicated by the betrothing compact into which a man and woman are represented as entering, by the ceremony of joining hands through the perforation, or

'stone-ring of Odin'. At the Temple of the Moon, C, the woman is invoking the king of the gods, on her knees, to enable her to fulfil her promise. The man performs the same ceremony at the Temple of the Sun, marked F.

E. Pillar Stone at Bridge of Brogar.

F. Ring of Brogar, called 'the Temple of the Sun'.
Archæologia Scotica, vol. iii, p. 122.

(1886) III, p. 227 referring to Wilson, *Prehistoric Annals*, 1851, pp. 150 f.]

Archaeologists now usually assign the Standing Stones of Stennis to the Bronze Age of Western Europe. See Introduction to the Report of the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Scotland. [Ed.]

JANUARY

NEW YEAR

The first day of the new year, old style, is also much respected, but not in so enthusiastic a manner as the former. (Yule.) [Arthur Edmondston, M.D., *View of the Zetland Islands* (1809) II, p. 67.]

I. Names. Antonmas, New Year, New'r' day Shet.

IV. Omens. d. from persons.

As first foot.

Unlucky. A flat-footed or 'plumb-soled' person.

A dark person.

A red-haired person.

[Ork. & Shet. *Miscellany*, I, p. 247.]

Ork.

Lucky. A fair person. [A. W. Johnston, *Ibid.*]

Ibid.

A handsome, well-proportioned person very welcome.

[Mlan MS.]

Ibid.

Omens. e. from animals.

To see a black lamb in the first of the season was unlucky.

[A. W. Johnston, *Ork. & Shet. Miscellany*, I, p. 217.] Ork.

V. b. On New'r'day work of every kind was begun. Men went to the fishing, if only for an hour ; girls began sewing and knitting if only for a few stitches ; a bit of simmond was woven ; a turf was turned ; a stone set up ; a shilling laid by ; a torn garment was mended ; a new one shaped ; the byre was cleaned out ; the fishing gear was repaired ; "everything pertaining to thrift was got under weigh to begin the year weel". [Edmondston and Saxby, pp. 136-146 in *County Folk-Lore*, III, pp. 199-203.]

And see IX below.

V. k, m. Formerly it was customary for companies of men, on New Year's morning, to go to the houses of the rich, and awake the family, by singing the New Year's song, in full chorus. When the song was concluded, the family entertained the musicians with ale and bread ; and gave them a smoked goose or a piece of beef. [N.S.A. *Orkney*, p. 142.]

Lady Parish, Ork.

k. At the parishes of Cross, Burness, etc., New Year's gifts under the title of 'Christmas presents', are given to maid-servants by their masters. [*O.S.A.*, VII, p. 488.] Cf. entries under V. b. and m. Ork.

m. 'Yetlin', a New Year dainty at Stenness, Orkney. [J. T. Smith Leask, *A peculiar people*, etc. (1931), p. 42.] Ork.

VI. Beliefs in supernatural events, witchcraft, etc.

A Walking Stone. In the parish of Birsay . . . the legend runs that every Hogmanay night as the clock strikes the hour of twelve, this stone begins to walk or move towards Birsay Loch. When the edge of the loch is reached it quietly dips its head into the rippling waters. Then, to remain firm and immovable until the next twelve months pass away, it as silently returns to its post. It was never considered safe for any one to remain out of doors at midnight, and watch its movements upon Hogmanay. Many stories are current of curious persons who dared to watch the stone's proceedings, and who the next morning were found lying corpses by its side. The latest story of the kind is that of a young gentleman from Glasgow, who formed the resolution to remain up all night, and find out for himself the truth or falsehood about this wonderful stone. One Hogmanay . . . the daring youth began his watch. As time wore on and the dread hour of midnight approached, he began to feel some little terror in his heart, and an eerie feeling crept slowly over his limbs. At midnight he discovered that, in his pacing to and fro, he had come between the stone and the loch, and as he looked towards the former he fancied that he saw it move. From that moment he lost all consciousness, and his friends found him in the grey dawn lying in a faint. By degrees he came to himself, but he could not satisfy enquirers whether the stone had really moved and knocked him down on its way, or whether his imagination had conjured up the assault.

There is another tale, of a more tragic nature, related of this walking stone. One stormy December day a vessel was shipwrecked upon the shore of Birsay, and all hands save one were lost. The rescued sailor happened to find refuge in a cottage close by this stone; and hearing the story of its yearly march, he resolved to see for himself all that human eyes might be able to discover. In spite of all remonstrances he sallied forth on the last night of the old year; and, to make assurance doubly sure, he seated himself on the very pinnacle of the stone.

There he awaited the events of the night. What these were no mortal man can tell ; for the first morning of the new year dawned upon the corpse of the gallant sailor lad, and local report has it that the walking stone rolled over him as it proceeded to the loch. [R. Menzies Fergusson, *Rambles in the Far North* (1884), p. 54 f. See *County Folk-Lore*, III, 4.] Ork.

Mr Hugh Marwick . . . gives a tradition of a standing stone at Faraclett, which also descended to the adjoining loch for a drink of fresh water on New Year's morn [*Pro. Ork. Antiq. Soc.*, III, p. 29.]

IX. Dancing.

There was a custom among the lower class of people in this country which has entirely subsided within these twenty or thirty years. Upon the first day of every new year the common people, from all parts of the country, met at the Kirk of Stainhouse [Stennis], each person having provision for four or five days ; they continued there for that time dancing and feasting in the kirk. [G. Low, *A Tour through the Islands of Orkney and Shetland*, etc. collected in 1774, (1879), Introⁿ. p. xxvi.] Ork.

The following account of Uphely-a in Shetland illustrates—

V. b. rites to repel Trows and all evil influences.

IX. Dancing, singing and merriment.

From New Year until ' Twentyfourth night ' work and play went hand in hand, and the merry season . . . sped to its end amid much enjoyment. On Twenty-fourth night the small family parties became enlarged and lost much of their domestic as well as their superstitious element. The young people . . . spent the evening in the house of some one who owned a large barn, where dancing was vigorously carried on. An old rhyme warned the young men to

Mak' the maist o' ony chance,
Yule is time to drink and dance.
New'r smas lucky lines suld bring,
Twenty-fourth night, get the ring.
Gie the lass a kiss, and mind
Time and tide are easy tined, (lost).

On Twenty-fourth night the doors were all opened, and a great show of pantomimic chasing and driving and dispersing of unseen creatures took place. . . . Iron was ostentatiously displayed, ' for Trows can never abide the sight o' iron.' The

Bible was read and quoted. People moved about in groups or couples, never singly, and infants were carefully guarded as well as sained by vigilant and learned 'wise women'.

On Twenty-fourth night the Trows retired to their gloomy abodes beneath the sod, seldom finding opportunity to re-appear again, and never with the same licence, until the Yules returned. . . .

When day dawned after Twenty-fourth night the Trows had vanished and the Yules were ended. Cf. Above. The Seasons. Winter. [Rév. Biot Edmondston & Jessie M. E. Saxby *The Home of a Naturalist* (1888), pp. 145, 6.]

See also vol. III, p. 243 of *Scottish Cal. Customs*. Shet.

IX. Guizers.

The squads of guizers when the old year was just about to close started a first footing. A lot of houses were opened into which they were welcomly received, and this harmless amusement was kept up till well on in the morning. [*Shetland News*, Jan. 15, 1898.] Shet.

James Scarty being found to be ane ordinar Sabath breaker, and to have upon New Yier even, under night, come to the minister his houss, and thair sung wantone and prophaine songs in contempt of the minister, and prophaned God's name, he is ordained to mak his publict repentance in sackloth before the pulpit, and pay his penalty. [Session Record of S. Ronaldshay and Burray, 1659, quoted in *Church Life in S. Ronaldshay & Burray in the 17th cent.* by Rev. J. B. Craven, p. 29.] Ork.

X. Procession, with tar barrels, etc.

In the *Shetland Times*, a fortnight since, Mr Alfred W. Johnston, London, asked for information as to when the present form of the 'Uphelly A' festival arose, and a correspondent writes us as follows :

"'Uphelly A' was always a notable date in the Shetland calendar, but it is only fifty years since it was first publicly observed in Lerwick. The celebration took the traditinary form of masquerading and dragging blazing tar barrels through the street. This was customary on all occasions of public rejoicing. The jubilee of King George III had been celebrated in this manner, from time to time the return of popular members of Parliament, and, of course, Yule and New Year's day were always honoured with these rites. But half a century ago tar barrels were falling decidedly into disfavour.

The 'City Fathers' feared the danger of fire, and good-wives complained that their houses were destroyed, as no one for days after could go into the street without bringing home tar on his feet. A few years after, though the masquerading continued, the tar barrels ceased, but the guizers found no difficulty in collecting subscriptions to provide torches for processions at 'Uphelly A' a change viewed with favour by the authorities. Several circumstances contributed to the popularity of this festival, one being that the celebration always began at a reasonable hour in the evening while the Christmas and New Year functions did not start till midnight. Another cause was the change from the Old Style to the New, for when the fifth of January was held as Christmas, it was really the heathen Yule and not the Christmas festival that was celebrated. When, by the adoption of the New Style, Christmas replaced Yule, it was found that much of the old mirth and joy had passed away with the change. But 'Uphelly A' still held by the Old Style, remained a relic of the old times, and continued to grow in popular favour. The torchlight procession, managed by a committee of the guizers, became the important event of the winter and was carried out on as large a scale as in recent years. Before 1889 the 'Skudlar' had adopted the title of Supreme Chief Guizer, and in this year *a new feature was added by the introduction of the Norse Galley* which now gives the note of distinction to the celebration. The '89 procession thus improved, was particularly successful. . . . 'From what I have written it will be seen that though 'Uphelly A' comes down to us from heathen times . . . yet the Torchlight Procession of to-day is only old in so far as it represents a development of the ancient Yule fires and the tar barrels of later times.

Since 1889 few changes have taken place in the manner in which the 'Uphelly A' festivities are carried out in Lerwick. In order to add to the Norse flavour of the celebration the annually elected Chief Guizer has assumed the title of Guizer Jarl. Fewer private houses are now kept open throughout the night, but the ladies club together and entertain in the various halls. The masqueraders are as orderly as ever, the dresses perhaps, taken altogether, are more elaborate than formerly, but as regards music there is a decided falling off from earlier days. Year by year, however, the celebration continues to attract more and more people from all parts of the islands and 'Uphelly A' is now regarded as the Winter Fair of Shetland.' [*Shetland Times*, March 4, 1911. See also *Old-Lore Miscellany*

of Orkney, etc., Viking Club, vol. iv, 66, where it is noted from the above account, that *the Norse Galley made its appearance and took the place of the tar barrels in 1889.*] Cf. V. c. above. Shet.

XI. Outdoor Games, football.

One of the most ancient of the new year celebrations is that held in the cathedral at Kirkwall in the Orkneys. The inhabitants, according to old Norse customs, divide into two sections and meet at the market cross to have a general game of football. All living above the cathedral play to get the ball to the country district, and those residing below the cathedral fighting to take it to the sea, the whole game being played through the principal streets of the town, and hundreds of players of all grades of society often take part in the game.

On Monday that annual game took place as usual. [*F.L.F.*, I (1883), pp. 332-333, quoting the *Yorkshire Gazette*, Jan. 6th, 1883.] Ork.

In the *Glasgow Herald*, Jan. 2, 1896, football is mentioned as having been played in many parishes on the preceding day. At Kirkwall, we are informed, ball playing began 'on the streets' at half-past eight in the morning. [*M. Peacock, Folk-Lore*, VIII (1897), p. 174.] Ork.

Football was played on Uphelli Day. . . . [*Ork. & Shet. Miscellany*, I, p. 247.] Ork.

On New Year's Day . . . there was the usual ball playing in the Kirkwall streets, two victories being won by the 'Doon-the-Gates', and one by the 'Up-the-Gates'. [*The Scotsman*, Tuesday, Jan. 2nd, 1906.] Ork.

6th

I. Name. Trettind-day, the Epiphany.

This was the thirteenth day of Christmas. According to what Jakobsen says it was mentioned in tales of superstition in the olden days. All those 'days' are forgotten about now. [Communicated by Mr. W. W. Ratter, 9th June, 1944.] Shet.

FEBRUARY

2nd

I. Name. Candlemas.

V. d. Divination by crows. It was at Candlemas that the lasses chased the crows. In the grey dawn of the morning a maid would steal forth and with fluttering heart give chase to the first 'craw' she chanced to see and watch with anxiety the direction to which it flew, for there dwelt her husband to come, and there lay her future home. But should the crow go the way of the churchyard, it was a sad omen, for it betokened that the lass would die an old maid. [John Nicholson, *Folk-Tales & Legends of Shetland* (1920), p. 80.] Shet.

24th

I. Name. Løbersmass, Leap day.

II. Saying. The laverick is to greet as long after Løbersmass as she sang before Candlemass,—harbinger of a bad spring. [Communicated by Mr W. W. Ratter, 2nd May, 1944.]

MARCH

3rd

V. Observances. a. *Things forbidden, work on a day of dedication.* The people do no work on the 3rd day of March, in commemoration of the day on which the church was dedicated to St Peter (see his day, June 29). [*O.S.A.*, XVI, p. 460.] Sandwich, Ork.

17 (O.S.) 29th (N.S.)

I. Name. Buggle-day.

V. e. Buggle-day. The old folk went out with spade and hoe, and dug over a small rigg. Having prepared the ground, the patch was sown with corn, which was carefully watched over during spring and summer, for on its success depended the prosperity of the whole crop. The ripe grain shorn from that small plot was carefully preserved and ground into meal, and that was used on next year's Buggle-day for the buggle cakes, which were flat round 'brunes' (scones). [*J. M. E. Saxby, Shetland Traditional Lore* (1932), pp. 73 f.] Shet.

m. † In times past a *buggle* or great bannock was baked for each member of the family on this day. [*Th. Edmondston, Glossary of Shet. & Ork. Dialect* (1866).] Ork. & Shet.

29th-31st

V. l. The last three days of March brought the 'buggle-ree' a tempest of wild weather when all men wisely remained indoors and overhauled their fishing-tackle and out-of-door implements. [*J. M. E. Saxby, Shetland Traditional Lore*, pp. 73 f.] Shet.

APRIL

Month

The Sheriff, Commissary and Justice of the Peace Courts, also the Provincial Synod of Shetland, the Presbytery (these more frequently) meet at Lerwick in the end of April. [Rob. Cowie, *Shetland*, etc. (1871), pp. 142, 3.] Shet.

Days

16th

I. Name. Feast of St Magnus or Maunsmas.

The festival was observed at this date and on Dec. 13th in the Orkneys and in Shetland. Masses and Horae for both days are given in the Aberdeen Breviary and in the Drontheim Missal. [Ed.]

III. Saint. St Magnus, Earl of Orkney, d. Ap. 16th, 1117

He shared the earldom with his kinsman, Hakon, by whom he was treacherously murdered on the isle of Egilshay. The *Orkneyinga Saga* relates that on the stony place where he fell there grew a fine green sward in testimony to his holiness. He was buried at Birsay in the church, Christ's Kirk, built by his grandfather, Thorfinn. . . . Here many miracles took place and the fame of the earl's holiness was so great that Bishop William, compelled to recognise his sanctity, raised his relics from the ground. 'The Bishop had the bones washed, and they were very clean and bright. Then he had a knuckle bone taken and tries it thrice in hallowed fire and it burned not but rather did it shine like gold. Some say that it then ran into the form of a cross. The body was then laid in a shrine, and set over the altar. That was on St Lucia's day (Dec. 13th); he had then lain in the earth twentyone years. Then the custom was established that each day should be hallowed, the day that he was taken up and the day of his death.' [*The Orkneyinga Saga*, Trans. by A. B. Taylor (1936), p. 220.]

In a vision to a yeoman in Westray the saint revealed that he wished to be removed east to Kirkwall, where Rognvald, having been delivered from danger after intercession to Magnus, built to his memory the great cathedral church of the Orkneys. He was patron saint of Orkney and popular in Shetland; he had dedications among the Celts and an altar as far south as

Dundee. Rev. John Brand, *A brief Desⁿ. of Orkney & Shetland*, p. 46, says his cup was preserved at Scapa, and was presented filled with strong ale to each new bishop on entering upon his episcopate at Kirkwall; emptied at a draught it presaged a fruitful episcopate. Magnus is said to have crossed the Pentland Firth to Caithness on a stone which still bore the marks of his feet at the time of Martin's visit. In days before the Reformation evildoers were put to stand barefooted on this stone, in S. Ronaldshay, as a penance. He was seen riding through the streets of Aberdeen after the battle of Bannockburn, bearing the first tidings of the defeat of the English. After Flodden, also, legends say he was seen riding in country parts of Aberdeenshire. See Rev. J. Brand, *A brief Description*.

At the battle of Summerdale, 1529, fighting against the Earl of Caithness and Lord Sinclair, the Orkney men held opinion that their patron St Magnus was seen to fight in the field on their side. [Holinshed, *Hist. of Scot.*]

The shrine of St Magnus was the resort of many pilgrims. A Gaelic hymn to 'Magnus of my love', invoking his blessing on cows and herds, sheep and lambs, is quoted in *Carmina Gadelica*, I, p. 178 f. For a recent short reliable life see A. W. Brøgger, *Ancient Emigrants*, Rhind Lectures for 1928.

Ork. & Shet.

To this day the Shetlander, when in danger, invokes the assistance of the Virgin and St Magnus. [Ed. Charlton, *Old-Lore Misc. of Orkney*, etc. Viking Club, IV, pp. 128, 9.]

Ork. & Shet.

Many ceremonies attended his (St Magnus') festival. [Hugh Marwick, *Pro. Ork. Antiq. Soc.* I, p. 20.]

According to Baring Gould Magnus' relics were taken, part to Aix-la-Chapelle and part to St Vitus' Church at Prague.

Robert Bruce of Scotland ordered that five pounds sterling be paid to St Magnus' kirk, Birsay, from the customs of Aberdeen.

See J. R. Tudor, *The Orkneys & Shetland* (1883), pp. 35-37.

It would be difficult to say *who* canonized Magnus. [E. W. Robertson, *Scotland*, etc. (1862) p. 404, note.]

17th

V. e. Farm & byre; sowing oats. No man in this parish will sow oats before the 17th April, by which means the best season is often lost. [*O.S.A.*, VII, p. 586.]

Aithsting & Sansting; Ork. & Shet.

MAY

Month

II. The fear of May marriage is reported from the Orkneys. [*N. & Q.*, 10th Series, XII, p. 483, Dec. 1919.]

Will it be extravagant to say that ninety-eight per cent. of the marrying females in Orkney . . . submit without demur to the superstition expressed in the couplet,

‘Marry in May and rue the day’?

[J. T. Smith Leask, *A peculiar People*, etc. (1931), p. 239.] Ork.

III. 4-leaved clover. About the middle of May the wives set their *kirns*, *milk-spans*¹ and *raemikles*² (butter kits) in the *well stripe* to steep. The youngsters were employed to search for four-leaved *smora*³ (clover), the finding of which was considered extremely lucky, and anyone possessed of this holy plant was considered proof against the evil designs of witches.

[J. Spence, *Shetland Folk-Lore*, p. 139.] Shet.

IV. Early in May was held the ‘Beltane-Foy’. Large bonfires were lit, and the boys danced round them singing sea carols. He was considered the best man of the lot who could jump over the bonfire without injury. [J. M. E. Saxby, *Shet. Tradit. Lore* (1932), p. 74.] Shet.

Leaping the flames decided by lot. The word Beltane . . . has no connection with the Phœnician Baal, but involves the idea of whiteness or brightness from the fires then lit. . . . [G. Henderson, *Survivals in Beliefs among the Celts* (1911), p. 261, note.]

Days

1st

I. Name. The words *Beltane* or *Belting* and *Yule*, are still retained in Zetland, the former answering to Whitsuntide. . . . Both these periods are well understood, and scrupulously recognised, as well as the festival of Halloween; nor is it possible to trace the time when these names and their allusions were first introduced. [Arthur Edmondston, M.D., *View of the Zetland Islands* (1809), vol. I, pp. 135-6.]

¹ Old Norse, *spann*, a pail, a butter measure.

² *rjómakolla*, cream or milk pail. ³ Smari, clover (A. W. Johnston).

Many however are here recorded as for 1st May. [Ed.]

V. c. Fires for three days. Beltane had its three days Ree . . . and during that time fires were heaped and kept blazing and the sun was respectfully greeted with 'Gude morneen, an' shaw your e'e'. [J. M. E. Saxby, *Shet. Tradit. Lore* (1932), p. 74.] Shet.

At the Beltane bonfires the person who jumped most through the fire at its hottest was considered the best man. [Josh. Hay, Winbrek, per A. W. Johnston, *Ork. & Shet. Misc.*, I, p. 295.] Orphir, Ork.

At this day . . . rites and ceremonies pagan in character are still practised. Still the Beltane fires are kindled, and the 'children passed through the fire to Moloch'. [A. Lawrenson, *Proc. of Soc. of Antiquaries of Scot.*, X (1875), p. 712.] Shet.

V. g. Fishermen's Customs. In the festivities of the olden time there seems to have been special respect paid to the number three. For example, during the season, the crew of a *haf* boat had three feasts, viz. : the *Doon-drawin'* at Beltane, (the others at Johnsmas and at Lammas).

Note. The *haf* boat went out to deep sea fishing. [John Spence, *Shetland Folk-Lore*, p. 188.] Shet.

V. i. † Visiting stones. We have most definite recognition of both Beltane and Midsummer sun-worship at the circle and Maeshow of Stenness. [Magnus Spence, *Orkney and Shet. Misc.*, Viking Club, I, p. 184.] Ork.

3rd

I. Name ; Korsmas : see also September 14th.

24th

V. c. The 'Fiery Fight' ; latterly connected with the royal birthday and held on the 24th of May. The pile was incomplete without an old boat, which was by no chance begged or bought, but was always forcibly abducted. In the midst of the whole was a tall flagstaff. When the light was applied it became evident from the excitement on the faces of the assembled crowd that, while they were intent on watching the blaze, they had an ulterior object in view. The Up-the-Gates and the Down-the-Gates, grim and determined, muster at their respective sides of the fire. When the conflagration is at its height, it is seen that the middle tree, caught in the bight of a rope, is swaying to one side, and loud cheers rise from the successful faction. But suddenly—and very few see

how it comes about—the mast is straightened by an opposite pull, and cheers, or rather roars, go up all round. The swaying of the pole turns the bonfire into an open crater; the flame gets freer access to the butt of the stick which is now burning clearly. But it has lost its support, and falls to the lucky side. Immediately the unburned part is gripped by as many hands as there is space for and off it goes to its goal, Burgar's Bay or the harbour. . . . The heavy end of the mast, sometimes on the ground, sometimes swinging free, goes forward in the rush, and by and by is jammed with the crowd into the narrow court above the head of the town, or plunged with a hiss into the harbour. The middle tree disposed of, back comes the crowd to the bonfire, and congregates on the weather side of it. While there is still a high circle of flame, a hero, with a rush, jumps into the centre of the crater and out at the other side. He is followed by another and another. The less agile break down the outer wall, and when the burning fragments have been kicked through the crowd of onlookers and all over the street, the revels end for a year.

[B. H. Hossack, *Kirkwall in the Orkneys* (1900), pp. 465 ff.]

Ork.

JUNE

Month

Lerwick. In June the town is in the throes of its short, strenuous herring fishing season, when every one thinks herring, talks herring, and, so southerners aver, dreams of herring. . . . [Official Guide,³ *Shetland*, p. 42.]

A great annual fair (for the visit of Dutch traders) was held in the end of June, on a hillock three miles from Lerwick, still called the 'Hollanders' Know'. . . . The arrival of these picturesque vessels ('busses') and their equally picturesque crews, still lends an agreeable variety to Lerwick life, in the end of June, each year. . . . During their sojourn one day has been set apart, from time immemorial, . . . for exercise on horseback. [Rob. Cowie, M.A., M.D., *Shetland*, etc. (1871), pp. 135, 6.]
Lerwick, Shet.

Days

9th

I. Name. St Columba's Day.

See *Scottish Calendar Customs*, II, June. There are several dedications to St Columba in Orkney and Shetland.

V. b. Marriage. In Shetland 'among the peasantry marriages almost invariably take place on a Thursday, St Columba's day. [*Trans. Gael. Soc. of Inverness*, XVIII, (1891), p. 2.]
Shet.

VI. Beliefs in magic and occult powers.

† *Magic at St Columba's Chapel*. 20th April, 1660. At the examination of Kathareen Mansome, suspected of witchcraft and charming, 'John Budge, sonne to Donald Budge, who had beene heavily diseased (and as was suspected maid use of Kathareen Mansome her skill and cures) compeired, and did ingenuously confes that in tyme of his heavy sicknes he went to the old chappell in Groemness (called St Columbes chappel) and that bot once; efter quhilk he was worse, but that he went of his own notione, not by advys of Kathareen Mansome or any other. He is ordained to make his repentence befor the congregatiōne befor he gett the benefit of marriage. . . .'

'Peterkirk, 6 May 1660, being Sondag, efter sermone and prayer, Johne Budge, in the South parish, called befor the

pulpite and compeiring, hombled upon his knees, evidenced his publiet repentence for his superstitiones and sinfull going to St Collumbes Chappell in Groemness in tyme of his sickness.' [Rev. J. Craven, *Church Life in S. Ronaldshay etc.*, p. 31 f. ; quoting the Session Record.] S. Ronaldshay, Ork.

VI. Herbs were gathered on Midsummer Eve for . . . enchantment, in Orkney. [Viking Society.] Ork.

24th

I. Name. Johnsmas.

V. c. Johnsmas Fires. Kirkwall, June 21st, 1708. It was overtured that in regard superstitious practices are yet in many places in the bounds of the Synod not withstand[ing] of former Acts y^r anent that Johnmas fires which are commonly observed sometimes in this month are very common in many paroches. Therefor recommends to the several ministers where this or the like superstitious custome is to deall with persons and to bring them to a sense of y^r sin and that they continue to rebuke the same from y^r pulpits and in the meantime that application be made to the steward or Sherreff of the county that he write to his baillifs of the severall paroches and that they punish the same upon complaint made by the minister or session of the bounds. [*Register of the Synod of Caithness and Orkney.*] Ork.

V. c. The late Mr Joshua Hay, of Winbrek, told me that he remembered Johnsmas' bonfires being lit in every township in Orphir. In the town of Orphir it was lit behind the manse on the shoulder of the hill. Can this be the 'Heildibrae, a place where bonefires used to be kindled', referred to by the Rev. Francis Liddell in the *Old Statistical Account*, vol. XIX, p. 411. [A. W. Johnston, *Orkney and Shetland Miscellany*, Viking Club, vol. I, p. 295.] Ork.

In fires the children in some places light on midsummer night (Johnsmas) . . . the boys leap over the flames. [J. Spence, *Shetland Folk-Lore*, p. 90.] Shet.

The symbolic bonfires of Orkney have now, I understand, been entirely given up. Fifty years ago most parishes had them ; to-day not one. In Orkney we have sun-temples, sun-fires, sun alignments, and sun myths in considerable numbers.

The only bonfires in Orkney during the memory of the oldest inhabitants were the Johnsmas bonfires. There is just a faint tradition of Lammas ones being observed also. A fortnight before Johnsmas, all the boys and girls of the

district from 12 to 16 years of age, set out after sunset for the hill. In Birsay it meant a distance of two miles. Heather, the longest we could get, was pulled, bound, thrown on our backs and home we came with our burdens about 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning. This was repeated for five or six nights till we had filled a little house in the neighbourhood, which was the measure of our responsibilities. Johnsmas fire was all the juvenile talk for days previous. On Johnsmas eve, cattle, horses, sheep and geese, were all housed earlier than usual, say 8 o'clock. It seems stranger still how our elders became imbued with a similar spirit. Fathers, of solemn religious disposition, who on ordinary occasions would never dream of going abed till the youngsters were asleep, relaxed their moral code for the ten days previous, and actually assisted to make farm stock secure earlier on that eve. Two of the strongest youths yoked themselves in a wheelbarrow, tandem fashion, and set off to the nearest peat-stack. From each peat-stack they were allowed as much as could be built on the barrow, and so on from the five or six farms in the neighbourhood—well nigh two cart-loads. These were built in a heap, and a bone sometimes inserted. In Birsay, if I remember correctly, the bone was thrown in when the fire was at its height. The site was generally a prominence used from time immemorial, e.g., the brow of Greeny Hill in Birsay. Each member provided himself repeatedly with a large bunch of heather, ignited it, ran up, down and round the face of the hill. Twenty or more doing this caused an animated hill-side in the 'grimlings' of midnight. By this time some young men who considered they had outgrown these superstitions joined in making the hillside aglow with fiery halos. Leaping through the flames was indulged in, especially towards morning. Thus it continued till 2 o'clock, when daylight had fairly set in, and all sought their beds, ignorant of the meaning of the whole show, and quite oblivious as to what Johnsmas eve meant; religious clothes donned for the time being, found somewhere in the wardrobes of the Past, aired once a year, and now for ever cast aside; religious ceremonies now unreal and shadowy through the mists of successive generations.

Such were the bonfires I have taken part in. Probably the only other bonfires in Birsay were at Hundland and Ravey Hill. There the bone was generally built in before the fire was lit. In Orphir there were at least two—one at Yarpa and the other above Clestrain. Mr R. Flett, Orphir, informs

me that the Clestrain one ceased about fifty years ago. Some old people told him a bone was thrown in the fire, others said no. One old woman told him the bone represented the bones of the man who killed the martyr, but could not say who the martyr was. There were two in Stenness—at Bigswell and Germiston ; in Stromness, one above Uttertoun ; in Rousay, several ; one near Hullion, one north of Westness, and others on the opposite side of the island. In Evie, Mr Mainland, Kirkwall, informs me that several could be seen from Hullion, Rousay. In Westray there were at least two—one in Skelwick and another above Pierowall. As peats and heather were not abundant, old boats and other combustibles were used. In Firth there were three—one above Moan, one in Kingsdale, and a third above the shore near the boundary between Firth and Rendale. I find no trace of any in Deerness, and there were few, if any, in the east Mainland and Stronsay. At Moan, Firth, the bonfire was associated with more of the superstitious element. Mr J. Firth, Finstown, says :—

‘ The fire had to be lit with a live coal from a neighbouring house. When the flames were at their height, young people jumped through them. Maidens who wished a peep into the future pulled from the fire a half burnt peat. This was carried carefully home, dipped in the “ strang bing ” and laid above the “ odder stone ”, or lintel, till next morning when it was taken down with much fear and trembling, broken across, and the colour of the fibry material still holding between the two parts, decided the colour of her future husband’s hair. A bone was thrown in whenever one could be readily got. The farmer who wished a bountiful crop the ensuing harvest had a large heathery torch made, probably a number of them, lit one at the Johnsmas fire and never allowed it to get extinguished till the whole circumference of the field had been traversed. This ceremony was gone through with the utmost gravity. The two fires on the north side of Firth could be easily seen by those taking part in each, and probably two miles apart. At a certain previously understood hour, a party from each set out with several heather torches, one of which was lit at each fire and carried along hurriedly till both parties met. This successfully accomplished meant that the farming interests of the two communities would meet with prosperity.

Mr Thos. Brown, Hundland, Birsay, gathered the following information for me. Old Mrs Johnston, Grindlay, told him that in her young days she was staying at Aikerness, and How, Evie, when every community with a goodly number of young

folks had a bonfire. The custom there only differed from that at other bonfires in the practice of fixing bundles of heather on forks to chase one another with and circle round the fire. Another old woman he consulted was Betsy Craigie, Myre, who had at one time lived in Rousay, and remembered those taking part in the proceedings (elderly people, no doubt) carrying the blazing heather into the byres among the cattle, and where possible around them to make them thrive. This was especially done with the cows in calf, to prevent them 'casting' calf, and round those not in calf to ensure procreation. Mrs Jean Spence told him that a bone was regularly put in the one on Ravey Hill.

The following interesting account of a bonfire near Hobbister, Orphir, was given me by Mrs R. Reid, Kirkwall.

The old woman in whose vernacular she tells the story is 88 years of age, and when asked if she remembered bonfires, replied : ' Div I no, I dae that, and many a night's sleep I hae wanted owre them, but that's lang, lang ago, an' I dinna think they fash wi' the like o' that things noo. A lock o' his youngsters, aye and bairns frae the schule, for at least a munt afore the time used tae gather as muckle heather as we could carry hame till near the time tae make the bonfire ; then a lock o' peerie aens—aye an' big aens tae—wad gather frae the hooses roond aboot, taking their heather wi them, an' big the heather for lighting on the highest knowe near at hand, but clear o' hooses ye ken for fair o' settan fire tae the thaik. Thus we had a big lowe an' we keepit it gaun till the morning an' we thowt it was rale fun, only wi' the want o' darkness it did not shaw sae bright. After it was burned a whiley the boys used tae tak some o' the lichted coves an' run about till they slocket, whan they can back and played the same plunkie tae the end o' the bonfire, aye, aye, bit it was grand fun. I niver heard any reason for the rinnin round wi' the lichted coves, but I wadna winder if this wis nae sumthin tae dae aboot keepin aff fairies for the year, bit I never even heard my grand-mither say anything about that but I ken there was some auld bit o' superstition in it, folk wis verra ignorant in auld times, an that was what kept sa many fairies an' ghosts about.'

Mr J. W. Cursiter assures me there were no periodic bonfires in Kirkwall. . . . These feasts were not for the youths or the community to make sport at, but genuine sun-charms, where sacrifices were offered, and very probably the bone thrown into the Orkney bonfires towards morning was symbolic of the animal sacrifices offered to the Sun-god as he

neared the horizon, heralded by the glorious halo of dawn. Sir Norman Lockyer, in *Stonehenge, and other British Stone Circles*, suggests that Beltane sun-worship was an older form than Midsummer; the finer workmanship of Maeshow, and the mechanical skill and careful orientation would certainly give prominence to this theory.

There are traces of other fires at one time fairly common in Orkney, but of which even tradition is silent. In most parishes there are knowes which are covered with ashes and burnt stones, broken by the action of fire till they resemble road metal. They are generally near water or wells. In most cases they bear no names, probably the Norse conquerors did not know their purpose and allowed the names to drop. In Birsay, near a very powerful spring called Furs-a-Kelda, or well with a force of water, there are two knowes close together called the Knowes of Furs-a-Kelda. One not far from the smaller circle near the Harray Loch is called Kokna-Cumming; I think there is a pair here also. Near Seater, Deerness, on the south slope of the Wart, there is one called Koffer Howe. No ordinary bonfires could have broken hard, igneous, sea-beach stones in fragments as we find them. In most parishes there is one or more, but there is no tradition left to help us. Fairies dance on them and dwell in them. Whether they are the sites of the need-fires of the district it is hard to say.

We have already seen that a good crop was secured if the field had been surrounded deasil, or with the sun, by fire lit at the bonfire. [Magnus Spence, *Ork. & Shet. Miscellany*, Viking Club, I, pp. 180 ff.] Ork.

(In Orkney) They are wont . . . in any distress to carry a load of peats to the Johnsmas fire, which is regularly kept up on the 24 day of June. This last is the only publick custom they seem to have greatest anxiety to keep up, and is thus; they light a large fire on every the most conspicuous place of the parish, commonly facing the south, and this is augmented by every person who attends, none of whom come empty; likewise every person whose horses have been diseased, or who had any of these gelded, brings them loaded with fuel to this fire, and after with great attention placing every peat on the top of the fire, every beast is led round the same, always taking care to follow the course of the sun in their several turns, else they imagine their thanks for the recovery of the beast is not properly returned. The people go round in the same manner, and take the same number of turns . . . and this with a great deal of solemnity, and they are very ill pleased if any one

attempts to turn these things into ridicule, or even to argue with them on the absurdity of the custom. Sometimes great part of the parish assemble at this time, and dance round and thro the fire till late in the evening. [From an unpublished MS. of the Rev. George Low, Minister of Birsay, 1774-1795, in the *Pro. Orkney Antiq. Soc.*, I, p. 55.] Ork.

The old folks used to light large fires on Johnsmas even . . . the reason I have heard given was that it was to keep the witches from cutting the corn. I remember hearing an old man say that he had seen a piece of corn which had been cut in this way. He said 'It was cutted just like the three taes o' a pot, an' the stubbles were as black as ink.' [P. Leith, *ibid.*, p. 26.] Ork.

A Johnsmas legend. John Gunn in *The Orkney Book* (1900) pp. 443 ff, quotes a legend, in verse, of the Island of Boray, off Milburn Bay in Gairsay. Here the spirits of those who had died in the faith of Odin were allowed to revisit earth in their original forms on St John's Eve. Landing on the island at nightfall they danced and held revels till St Magnus' midnight chimes were heard in the distance.

V. c. & n. bonfires, games and riddles. Next after Beltane came the foy of Summer-mill (mid-summer) . . . from an old Norse word *mil*, meaning between or in the middle. This festival was one of the most important . . . what nowadays would be styled a thanksgiving ceremony . . . Roogues (heaps) of stones were piled, bones of fish and animals, peats, straw, sea-weed, flowers, feathers, even a *tet o' oo* (tuft of wool). To these would be added the *ormals* (broken remains) of any household article, with *pellis* (rags). On top of all was set a small wooden kapp, containing a little fish oil. A glorious blaze would rise from that bonfire, and it burning to the foundation without any replenishing meant the best of all good luck. . . . There were a number of odd charms as well as *sainin'* (spells for protecting all *and the peats* from Trows). Games and asking riddles occupied most of the time. . . . A great many of these antics were clearly of Scottish origin and belonged to the British St John's Mass with which Summer-mill had been incorporated. [J. M. E. Saxby, *Tradit. Shet. Lore*, p. 76.] Shet.

V. c. Bonfires in Orkney, connected with Commemoration of Bannockburn. The Rev. Alexander Pope (*circa*. 1780), in a note to his translation of Torfæus' *History*, gave a very different cause as the origin of those fires. In Torfæus' *History*, the name

Hareck, of Njáll's Saga, is Latinised into *Harecus*. Pope, in his translation, retains the Latin form *Harecus*, and adds a note stating that 'Harecus, Hacro, or Hacrow, of that ilk, is an ancient and brave family in Orkney, of whom some are still extant. The laird of Hacro commanded 300 men at the battle of Bannockburn, and fought like a hero. He afterwards returned to Orkney with great honour; in commemoration of which there is yearly, on St John the Baptist's Day, a bonfire at every farmer's house in Orkney. All the islands and the mainland appear as if in a cloud of smoke that day.'

Sir Walter Scott, while in Orkney in 1814 (Lockhart's *Memoirs*, 1837, vol. iii., p. 204), noted down the same tradition while at Stromness:—'Here we found the vestiges of a bonfire, lighted in memory of the battle of Bannockburn, concerning which every part of Scotland has its peculiar traditions. The Orcadians say that a Norwegian prince, then their ruler, called by them Harold, brought 1,400 men of Orkney to the assistance of Bruce, and that the King, at a critical period of the engagement, touched him with his scabbard, saying, "The day is against us." "I trust," returned the Orcadian, "your Grace will venture again"; which has given rise to their motto, and passed into a proverb.'

A similar tradition to that mentioned by Scott is current among descendants of the Halcro family, the hero being the Laird of Halcro. The motto of Halcro of Coubister is, 'We'll put it to a venture'. An old oak shield, with the Halcro arms and motto (c. 1700), taken from the old parish church of Orphir, is in the possession of Mr James Johnston of Coubister, the representative of this branch of the family. There is, of course, no connection between the names *Hareck* or *Hárekr* and *Harens*, nor between *Harens* and *Halero*.

I may add that the other day I spoke to an old man who, over 70 years ago, lent a hand in getting up the annual bonfire near Settiscarth, in Firth, in two successive years. There were three farms who specially attended to the affair, and it seemed to be regarded almost in the light of a religious observance. The pulling of heather for it occupied two or three days, but the honour of carting home the heather fell to the house possessing a stallion foal, as those were considered of much greater value than foals of the other sex. My informant, who has been in many parts of the world, assured me that in no other place has he ever seen so much superstition as then existed in the Settiscarth district, and particularly in regard to the knowe on which the Johnsmas fire was lighted. He

could not remember bones being put into the fire, nor lighted 'coves' being carried for any special purpose. [A. Crab in *Ork. & Shet. Miscellany*, vol. I, pp. 243-245.] Ork.

V. d. Divination by ribwort.¹ In the month of June came Johnsmas, when the fair maids would hold a 'banquet', as such a gathering was termed, and 'lay up' the *Johnsmas floors*. Two bits of ribwort were selected; one stalk was short and represented the girl, the other slightly longer was her sweetheart. From both of these the flowerets were removed, and the twain carefully rolled in a dock-leaf and buried in the ground. Next morning they were unearthed, and if it were found that the flowerets had reappeared in both it was regarded as a happy sign indeed. [John Nicholson, *Folk-Tales & Legends of Shetland* (1920), p. 80.] Shet.

This custom is reported also from personal knowledge by Mr W. W. Ratter of Lerwick.

Divination by a hair in grass, 'puskin girs'. Another custom at Johnsmas was to pull a handful of grass and examine it carefully to see whether hair was among the grass, if so the colour of the hair would indicate the colour of the sweetheart's hair, or rather the colour of one's life-partner's hair. 'Pusk' in this instance must come from the Norse *puska*, to pluck at, 'girs' is of course grass. [Communicated by Mr W. W. Ratter of Lerwick, 29th November 1943.] Shet.

V. g. Fishermen's customs. At Johnsmas, midsummer (the crew of a hap-boat) supped the 'milgruel kits'. [J. Spence, *Shet. Folk-Lore*, p. 188.]

Johnsmas is regarded by the fishermen as a holiday. [*N.S.A.*, Shetland.] Shet.

V. i. Visiting Stones, etc. The traditions regarding midsummer worship at the Standing Stones need not be repeated; the betrothals and divorces; the cures of the insane, imbecile, deformed and bewitched. . . . Diseased subjects went about the Stenness circles three times (deasil). cf. above, New Year, V. i. [Magnus Spence, *Ork. & Shet. Miscellany*, Viking Club, I, pp. 185 f.] Ork.

V. n. Games and riddles. Cf. V. c. above.

¹ Mr Williamson of the Manx Museum staff, when on active service in 1943 in the Faroe Islands reported from there that the ribwort plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*) was known as *Jóansøkugras* because of its association with divination on *Jóansøka*, the midsummer festival on 24th June.

VI. Johnsmas witchcraft. Johnsmas was the season when witchcraft was most dreaded, and persons skilled in the black art deprived their neighbours of the profit of their milk and butter. [John Spence, *Shetland Folk-Lore*, p. 139.] Shet.

A person named Garth, in Yell, having contracted 'ane great fever and lyghtnes in his head, that he could get no rest nor sleip in somer 1613 : and Gregorius Thomasone haveing cum to visite him, and informit of the said diseas, he tauld Garth that thair was ane woman in Delting, called Barbara Stovd, quha culd give him ane resting threid'. Gregorius repairing to the woman under silence of night, and describing the patient's state, she refused to give him a thread until he should himself apply for it : ' quhair of Garth being aduerteisit be the said Gregorius, he come over to hir, and [they] come togither to hir in ane somer morneing, earlie befor the sone, about Jonesmes 1614 : and at said conference, she tuik ane woll threid, and visit certane crossis and coniurations upoun it. She gave it to hir dochter to be given to the said Garth, to be woone about his head nyne nyghtis, and then to be burnt : quhairby Garth gat rest.' Afterwards because, ' at certyne tymes of the moone, he found himself not so weel as he wount to be, he came to hir this somer, and desyrit hir to mak him perfytt haill, quhilk she promiseit to do at hallowmes nixt'. [*County Folk-Lore*, III, p. 136 quoting J. G. Dalzell, *The Darker Superstitions of Scot.*, pp. 118, 119.] Shet.

Leechcraft in Orkney

Stromness, Orkney. *Trial of Kathrine Taylor.*—Saturday, July last, 1708.—After Prayer Sedr., Minister and elders *pro re nata*.

The said day the minister reported that being informed that Kathrine Brown, spouse to William Stensgar in Southside, had been employing one Kathrine Taylor, a cripple beggar woman in Stromness, to come to her house and wash the said William, who had been long sick and afflicted in his bed, that by her Sorcerie and charming he might come to his health, and that the said Kathrine Brown coming to a common Slap¹ on the high way, carrying the water wherewith the said William was allegit to be washed, in a large Stoup, upon the twenty fourth of June last, about one or two hours in the morning, and emptying the said Stoup in the said Slap : wherefore he had appointed to Summon ye said Kathrine Brown and her Husband to this Dyet. The said Kathrine

¹ Gap.

and her Husband being called compeared, and both of them being accused, denied the charge, and the said Kathrine stiffly denied that she had been at the common Slap above written, whereupon the witnesses being called, compeared.

John More son to William More in Yeldabrec of the age of twenty four years, being admitted and deeply sworn purged of malice and partial counsell, deponed ; That he saw Kathrine Brown upon the twenty fourth day of June last more than an hour before sunrising, empty a stoup of water in the above mentioned Slap, and he coming to the said Slap did find a Stone and feal on the said water, or where it was spilled and as he was coming near he saw the said Kathrine gather up her coats, and run away most speedily. And that he suspecting some devilrie did break down a slap in another place of the dike and passed over.

George Langskail Deponed, That upon the twenty fourth of June he passed thro' the slap forementioned before sunrising and that he saw water in the said slap, and a little while after his passing the same he was overtaken by bodily indisposition ¹ tho' he would not blame the said Kathrine Brown therefore.

After several things had passed in the Session we are told That the said Kathrine Brown and her Husband confessed that the said Kathrine Taylor was called and came to their house, and all She did was to say over half a dozen words out of a psalm like a prayer beside the Husband.

The Session appointed Kathrine Taylor to be summoned to answer for using Sorcerie.

Sess. 2d. on the same.

Sept. 5, 1708.—Which day compeared Kathrine Taylor in Stromness being summoned to this dyet as were also William Stensgar and Kathrine Brown before mentioned, and the said Kathrine Taylor being accused of alleged Sorcerie and charms—she confessed that Kathrine Brown came for her when she was in Oliver Taylors house in the Southside and told to her her Husbands condition viz., That he wanted the power of one of his Knees, and enquired her if she could not *tell out the paine* of the said knee. Whereupon the said Kathrine Taylor condescended and went with the said Kathrine Brown to her house, and did *tell out the pain* of his knee. Being asked by what means she did it, She answered, She laid her hand on his bare Knee and spake these words,

¹ The meaning of this is :—They imagined the person who went next thro' the gateway was infected with the disease which had now left the other.

' As I was going by the way, I met the Lord Jesus Christ in the likeness of another man, he asked me what tydings I had to tell and I said I had no tydings to tell, but I am full of pains, and I can neither gang nor stand.' ' Thou shalt go to the holie kirk, and thou shalt gang it round about, and then sit down upon thy knees, and say thy prayers to the Lord, and then thou shalt be as heall as the hour when Christ was born.'

She repeated also the twenty third psalm indistinctlie and declared she did or spake no more. She likewise declared she learned this from an old woman when she was a child ; and that she has heard from others that a pain or a stitch has been *telled out* in that manner, and that she herself has done it before.—Low, pp. 201-203. [*County Folk-Lore*, III, pp. 133-135.]
Ork.

29th

XII. Religious observance, abstention from work. As the church (of Sandwick) was dedicated to St Peter the people also (as well as on March 3rd, consecration of the church) abstain from working for themselves on St Peter's Day, 29th June, but they will work to another person who employs them.
[*O.S.A.*, XVI, pp. 460 f.] Sandwick, Ork.

JULY

3rd

III. Saint. Sunnifa, Sineva, etc. She was reported to be the daughter of an Irish king of the latter end of the tenth century ; sought in marriage by a Viking. Her father being unwilling to accept the Viking as son-in-law his lands were subjected to raids and Sunnifa decided to leave her country. She set sail with her brother Alban and a company of virgins and landed on the island of Selja on the Norwegian coast, where they lived on fish. The island was visited in summer by people from western Norway as a summer pasturing ground for their cattle. When they saw Sunnifa and her company they took them to be a company of pirates and applied to king Hakon for help. An armed force was despatched and landed on the island, whereupon Sunnifa and her companions took refuge in a cave, but a rock closed over them leaving them no means of escape. In the reign of Olaf Tryggvason a farmer found a head with a phosphorescent halo, which he took to the king. A search was made and the cave full of bones was discovered, over this two churches were built, one dedicated to Sunnifa, the other to Alban. When these relics were brought to Bergen in 1170 Sunnifa was elected patroness of the town. She was honoured with several dedications in Orkney, there are remains of old foundations of a chapel in her name in Unst, near a landing place on the west side. The legend is believed by some to be a Scandinavian form of the legend of S. Ursula. The *Book of Saints* (St Augustine's Abbey, 1921) states : ' To them (Sunnifa and her company) the old Scottish church undoubtedly gave a liturgical cultus, as to canonised saints.' [See T. R. Tudor, *The Orkneys & Shetlands* (1883), p. 562. and F. G. Holweck, *Biographical Dict. of the Saints* (1924).] Ork.

16th

I. Name. St Martin Bullion's Day, Martina bullimas day. (July 4th, O.S.)

III. Saint. Martin of Tours, a popular saint in the North. [See *British Cal. Customs, Scotland*, July 16th.]

29th

III. Saint. Olaf, King of Norway, 1015-1030. Baptised

at Rouen at the age of 15. He was driven into exile by his unconverted subjects and killed in battle against them. He has many dedications in the Orkney and Shetland Islands.

XII. Festivals, etc. The gild festivals (in country gilds at least), took place once a year, sometimes in summer, specially on July 29th, St Olaf's Day. Members brought their own provisions and there was feasting and merry-making with a dash of religious service to leaven them. These gilds arose in sacrificial feasts of heathendom and passed under the care and patronage of the church, thus acquiring a religious flavour, a combination of feasting, honest drinking and pauses for religious refreshment. . . . Each gild was attached to a neighbouring church near which it had its gildhall, and it took its name from that church's patron saint. Thus in Norway gilds of St Olaf, St Michael, St Nicholas etc. [J. Storer Clouston, *Ork. Antiquarian Soc.*, XIV (1936-7).]

AUGUST

1st

I. Name. Lammas. In Shetland August 2nd is also called Lammas. In former times no kelp was burned after August 2nd, Lammas (see John Gunn, *Orkney Book*).

V. c. There is just a faint tradition of Lammas ones (bon-fires) being observed. [Magnus Spence, *Ork. & Shet. Miscell.*, Viking Club, I, p. 180.] Ork.

V. d. Rites of divination, see cup-reading, in fisherman's foy, V. g. below.

V. g. Fishing and sea-faring, the Foy. Every year about old Lammas the *haf*¹ fishing came to a close. The boats were then hauled up on the green and *uhumbled*² in their winter *böls*.³

But before the crew finally broke up for the season the *Foy* (feast) was held, generally in the skipper's house. To this feast every man brought his wife, and if single his sister or sweetheart.

The Foy table was laden with substantial fare. Home-made scones, burstin brōnies and sonsie pancakes, together with an ample supply of fresh butter and eggs, made good eating. A *rusted* (smoked) ham or a few legs of *vivda*⁴ gave variety to the bill of fare. On the table stood a couple of Dutch *krooks*, the contents of which cheered the hearts of these weather-beaten sons of toil.

The conversation, as may be supposed, turned chiefly on the fishing, each man recounting his experiences of the perils of the deep, and the hair breadth escapes he had made. The wives, too, were relating to each other their own or some neighbour's experience with *trous* and witches, and their numerous seasons of anxious waiting while their gudemen were at sea. One of the oldest women was generally called

¹ O.N. *haf*, the sea, applied in Shetland to the deep-sea fishing.

² Scotch, to turn upside down. O.N. *hválfa*, to turn upside down, keel uppermost.

³ O.N. *ból* a cattle pen, here applied to boats.

⁴ Unsalted beef or mutton hung up and dried.

upon to 'cast a cup' for the young men, who were anxious to get a peep into the future, particularly in matters of love, and who were generally gratified by hearing of courtships, *spörins*¹, and bridals.

As the contents of the *krook* were handed round the conversation became general and noisy. Healths were drunk in warm terms :

'Here's to dee, boy, as mony a blissin' as we hae crossed a saat watter drap tagedder.'

'Gude hadd His haand ower da corn, an' open da mooth o' da gray fish.'

'Here's death to da head dat wears nae hair' (i.e. fish)
'Aft may we maeet, an' never waar forn.'²

'Eerim skoorim, suntie voorim
Oorim skaerim skkaabo ;
If onybody wis me skaed,
May ill beskae himsel', O'.

In those days crews often fished together for many years, and the *foy* would occasionally take a devotional character, when some of the more emotional of the crew would recount with tear-bedimmed eyes the many providential deliverances of the past. [John Spence, *Shetland Folk-Lore*, pp. 235-237.]
Shet.

The Lammas Foy was chiefly concerned with the ending of summer white fishing season. . . . The whole seamen of a town would often join together for their foy, and each man brought a wife or sweetheart to the feast. The haaf-boats were hauled up, and 'weel pitten aboot' against the winter in their snug 'noorts'. As much variety as possible was a feature of the feast, and 'a drap oot o' da bottle' was indispensable. Cup-reading went the round, as did 'laying up of Goadika [riddles]'. Healths were drunk and songs were sung, but never was a foot lifted to dance at a Lammas Foy. [J. M. E. Saxby, *Shetland Trad. Lore* (1933), pp. 76 f.]
Shet.

Cup reading at the Foy

This rite is described as known in the W. Isles, but was probably performed in the same way in Shetland.

¹ Proposals, O.N. *spyrja*, to ask ; *spurn*, *spurning*, asking a question.

² O.N. *farinn*, perf. part. of *fara*, to travel, fare ; Spence says *forn*, fed.

When reading cups, the cup before being read, should always be tossed with its face towards the sun, and when one goes to those who can read cups correctly they will ask your sweetheart's name, and all you have to do is to tell them that, and if you tell them that correctly, they will tell you everything about him. [Mlan MS.] Islay, Argyll.

V. g. Before striking their tents at Lammas and bidding adieu to the perilous occupations of the summer, the fishermen who have been accustomed to associate together during the season, meet and take a parting cup, when the usual toast on this occasion is 'Lord! Open the mouth of the grey fish, and haud thy hand about the corn'. This meeting is known as the fishermen's foy. [N.S.A., *Shetland*, p. 132.] Sandsting & Aithsting, Shet.

V. k. Doles and gifts. The tenants' wives went regularly, about the term of Lammas, to the feuars' wives, their landladies, with presents of butter, cheese, eggs, etc. hence called Lammas presents. [O.S.A., XV, p. 394.] Stronsay & Eday, Ork.

XII. Festivals, etc. It was formerly a custom at St Ollav's fair, at Kirkwall (Orkney) that the young people of the lower classes of either sex associated in pairs for the period of the fair, during which the couples were termed: *Lammas brother and sister*. [W. Motherby, *Pocket Dictionary of the Scottish Idiom*, p. 5a, see also W. Scott, *The Pirate* (1822), III, p. 1000.] Ork.

And see August V. g. The Foy, above.

20th

III. Saint ; St Rognvald, Earl of Orkney. His first name was Kali but he was given the name of Rognvald by Earl Sigurd in memory of Rognvald Brusi's son. He founded the cathedral of St Magnus at Kirkwall, Orkney, after gaining possession of the earldom. He was both warrior and pilgrim, 'skilfull in all feats of strength and a good skald'. He was slain in Caithness in 1158 and buried, first at Ladykirk in S. Ronaldshay, and afterwards in the Kirkwall cathedral. 'Bishop Bjarni, by leave of the Pope, had his relics taken up. There on the stone on which the blood of Earl Rognvald had dropped when he lost his life, that blood may still be seen even today as if it were new-shed blood.' [*Orkneyinga Saga*, Trans. by A. B. Taylor (1936), pp. 337, 8.]

St Rognvald was popular in the north among sailors, who made their vows to him, but no church in the Orkneys seems to have been under his patronage. There was . . . a Chapel Ronald, . . . in Kildrummy parish, Aberdeen, where there is also a spring bearing his name. [*Anc^t Church Ded^{ns}. N.*] Ork.

24th

I. Names. St Bartholomew's Day ; Barsoga. Cf. Harvest, Shet.
ridges bleed.

SEPTEMBER

14th

I. Name. Korsmass. See Jakobsen, *Dictionary*.

OCTOBER

III. Omen. Flocks of 'snaa fowl' seen before the last Sunday of Oct. foretell a severe winter. [Spence, *Shetland Folk-Lore* (1899), p. 113.] Shet.

DAYS

8th

III. Saint. Triduana, Tredwell or Tradwel, Trullen, Trodlen, Tildrin; she appears . . . in the church of St Treadwell in the Orkney island of Westray. In 1201 Bishop John of Caithness had his eyes put out by Earl Harald, but had them restored by a visit, as the Saga says, 'to that place where the holy Tröllhaena rests' . . . But we are no nearer the shadowy personality behind these names. [W. Mackay Mackenzie, in *The Scotsman*, Dec. 13th 1933.] Ork.

St Tredwell's Loch in Papa-Westray, Orkney, was very famous, partly from its habit of turning red whenever anything striking was about to happen to the Royal Family, and partly from its power to work cures. On a small headland on the east of the loch are still to be seen the ruins of St Tredwell's Chapel . . . with walls fully four feet in thickness. Many diseased and infirm people of the North Isles visited the place, many walked from the shore two or three times before entering the water, so engaged, nothing would induce the sufferer to speak, for if he did the waters would lose their power. [*Folk-Lore of Scottish Lochs and Springs*, p. 14.] Ork.

31st

I. Name. Hallow-e'en and -Mas. (November 1st.)

V. b. Drawing circles and placing knives in walls. In order to protect themselves from the attacks (of fairies and witches), some draw imaginary circles and place knives in the walls of their houses. [*O.S.A.*, XV, p. 311.] Sth. Ronaldshay, Ork.

V. d. Tyin' the Kale Stock. For this purpose the young folks went blindfold into the kale-yard, and each one tied his or her garter round the first kale-stock they touched, and the number of shoots on the kastik,¹ which was counted in the morning, was a forecast of the family of the future. [J. Spence, *Shetland Folk-Lore*, pp. 190, 1.] Shet.

Kailstocks by the door. Go blindfold into the kailyard

¹ Castock, stem of cabbage. [Cf. divination by *Knottin' the garter*, below.]

and pull a kail runt, the form of the root may foretell some peculiarity of your future spouse, then place it above the door, and the first who enters will be your future spouse, or one of the same name. [*Ork. & Shet. Miscell.*, Viking Club, I, p. 297.] Orphir, Ork.

Divination by a milt. Milt token. When the first mart was killed, about Hallowmas, the milt or spleen of the animal was taken out and laid on a board, and six cuts were made crosswise, equi-distant from each other. These cuts were not cut quite through the milt, the under side being left whole. They were named: the first, November; the second, December; the third, January; and so on to April. The milt was now laid in a dark place for three days and three nights. It was then carefully examined, and if a cut had closed and presented a dry appearance, the month it represented was to be mild and dry; but if the cut was open and dry, the month was supposed to be windy. An open and wet cut foretold wind and rain. [John Spence, *Shetland Folk-Lore*, (1899) pp. 117, 118.] Shet.

V. e. *The farm* etc. 'Auld Hallowmas', i.e. Old Style, and taking in the sheep from the fields occurred generally about the same time. [G. Stewart, *Shet. Tales* (1892), p. 78.] Shet.

Fathomin' the skroo. In olden times a small stack, commonly bere (barley) was set apart as an annual offering to *Broonie*. Now, one went blindfold into the cornyard and fathomed this *skroo*¹ three times with the sun, and thrice widdershins, and at the last turn they were supposed to clasp in their embrace the form of their lover.—perhaps Broonie himself. [John Spence, *Shet. Folk-Lore*, pp. 192, 193.] Shet.

Passin' the harrow. This was a performance seldom practised, except by some person of a 'deil-may-care' disposition, for while the other Hallowmas sports had for their object merely the forecasting of matters matrimonial, this was supposed to unfold the future, even the spirit world, and the person who had the hardihood to 'go i'da harrow' never revealed what they either saw or heard, and always warned others not to try such a trick. The performance was very simple. Three harrows were placed, some distance apart, outside the open fodder door of an old barn, and at the hour of midnight a person went blindfold into the yard and passed back foremost over each harrow in turn, thence through the

¹ A hay-cock, corn-rick; O.N. *skrüf*.

barn window, and at the end of this journey he was supposed to fall into a sort of trance and hear and see unutterable things. [*Ibid.*, pp. 193, 194.] Shet.

Turnin' the sleeve ; performed in a barn. This was performed at the hour of midnight. A person [persons] wishing to read the future by this means went all alone and unseen, and wet their shirt sleeve in a burn over which a corpse had been borne. They next retired to a barn or other outhouse and kindled a fire, hanging up the wet shirt as if to dry. The owner of the shirt now retires to the opposite end of the barn and lies down to wait. As the hours pass away, the dying embers cast weird shadows on the walls. Presently amid the gloom and fitful flicker an apparition is seen flitting across the floor and silently turning the wet sleeve.

This is none other than the phantom of the future husband or wife. If nothing is seen and the shirt remains unturned, the prier into futurity may look forward to a life of single bliss. But sometimes it was said that the dark outline of a coffin was seen, warning the poor watcher to prepare for another world. [*Ibid.*, pp. 191, 192.] Shet.

Castin' the clew. This was a more elaborate affair, and required a considerable amount of nerve for its performance. At the dead of night one person alone went to the water-mill, and getting on the roof, dropped a ball of worsted in through the *lum*, holding fast the end. Then the operator on the roof began to rewind the clew into another ball, repeating the while in a steady tone : ' wha hadds my clew end ? ' Then a voice from out the dark mill was expected to answer the name of the future husband or wife. [*Ibid.*, p. 191.] Shet.

Siftin' da siller. Hallowe'en afforded the greatest scope for peeping into the future. One method was that known as ' *siftin' da siller* '. A girl would go all alone into a dark room and placing some silver coins on a seive, would take her stand in front of the window, and repeat as she moved the seive with a peculiar motion :

' My siller I sift, my siller sift I,
If I be ta get a man, may he pass by.'

And if the future had a husband in store for that plucky lass, it was expected that his form would pass by the window ; but if she was to die an old maid she had perforce to behold the gruesome spectacle of a coffin lumbering past. [John Nicholson, *Folk-Tales and legends of Shetland* (1910), p. 8.] Shet.

Drying the chemise. Before bedtime a maid would go to a burn that ran where the lands of three lairds met to dip her chemise in the water. When she retired the chemise was hung in front of the fire in her room, and while she kept vigil, the man she was to wed would come into the place and turn the garment. [*Ibid.*, p. 82.] Shet.

Dropping the white of an egg. This was performed by dropping a small portion of the white of an egg into a glass of water. The forms assumed prognosticated the future in matters of love, fortune and death. [John Spence, *Shetland Folk-Lore*, (1899), p. 190.] Shet.

By coal under a piece of turf. A live coal was taken out of the fire, put into water, and then placed under a fail (a piece of turf). Next morning the fail was broken in two, and if there was a hair found the colour of it would be that of your future spouse. [*Ork. & Shet. Miscel.*, Viking Club, I, 297.]

Orphir, Ork.

By two straws. A process of divination by two straws placed on the embers, one representing a man, the other a woman. [George Stewart, *Shetland Tales* ² (1892), p. 142.] Shet.

V. g. *Fishermen's customs ; boats sailed.* Especially on Hallowe'en they use to sein or sign their boats, and put a cross of tar upon them, which my informer hath often seen. Their houses also some use then to sein. [John Brand, *Description of Orkney, Zetland, Pightland Firth & Caithness*, Pinkerton, III, p. 763.] Ork.

V. m. & n. Arrangements were made about the beginning of November for holding the Hallowmas banquets. The young lads banded themselves together in squads and went *hoosamylla* ¹ (from house to house), as maskers, commonly called *gröliks*. ² They received offerings of money, *burstin brönies*, ³ kegs of *viuda*, ⁴ or dried *sparks*. ⁵ When the rounds of the district had been completed, they repaired to a neighbouring barn with their sweethearts, and the banquet was spread. They amused themselves with such games as *hunt-da-slipper*, *wads*, ⁶ and

¹ Norse, *húsa-millom* [*húsa milli* ?], to go from house to house.

² Shetland, *gröli*, a troll, *grölek*, a masker (O.N. *grýla*, an ogre, bugbear.)

³ *Burstin*, fine ground meal made from barley dried in a pot ; *bröni*, a cake.

⁴ Beef or mutton hung and dried without salt.

⁵ The coarse parts of beef served up in one of the intestines, a sausage.

⁶ Forfeits, O.N. *veð*, a pledge.

haand-de-kroopin'.¹ The singing of good old ballads and the 'laying up' of *gaddiks*² gave a variety to the entertainment. But more frequently these guileless maidens and their happy lovers tripped with lightsome lilt the old Shetland reels, such as 'Nippen' Grund', 'Da Brunt Scones o' Voe', 'Da Scallo-way Lasses', 'Shak-im-troos', 'Kale an' knocked corn',³ etc. [John Spence, *Shetland Folk-Lore*, pp. 189, 190.] Shet.

VI. Trial of Isobel Sinclair, 1633. To preserve cattle she directed people to 'fyre ane piece of linyng cleath, and sing ane hair of the beast at alhalow even'. [J. G. Dalryell, *The Darker Superstitions of Scotland* (1835), p. 193.] Ork.

IX. Mumm^{ing}. Hallowmas Foy came on the 13th of October and was considered one of the most important festivals of the year. On Hallowe'en the *Grülks* (guizers) went a -guisering. The *Grülks* were usually the young men of a town dressed in most fantastic costumes. Tall, graceful hats, woven by themselves out of straw and adorned by many-coloured ribbons, gifted by sweethearts and sisters, were the indispensable head-gear. Their faces were concealed by veils. Their leader was called the Skudler, another carried a fiddle and was named the Reel-spinner. One of their number carried a buggie (bag formed from the skin of a sheep drawn intact off the carcase, cleaned and dried and forming a water-tight bag).

They went from house to house dancing and singing, and having their buggie filled with all sorts of dainties.

Next evening they went to the house of one of their number and held their foy. Portions of their viands they bestowed on some 'puir awmous peerie boy' (poor little charity boy). [J. M. E. Saxby, *Shetland Trad. Lore* (1930), p. 77.] Shet.

Straw helmets. Straw suits are still in some parts of Scotland worn by the peasantry in order to disguise themselves when going from house to house at Hallowmas or Martinmas, and at Christmas. Those disguised are sometimes termed in Scotland 'gyzarts' and also in some localities 'skeklers'. (O.N. *skekill*, the shanks or legs of an animal's skin when stretched out. Shetland name for a bogie, also a straw-disguised person. A. W. Johnston.) . . . The straw helmet is usually ornamented with long streamers of ribbons of different colours. One of

¹ *Handikruppen*, a game in which one stands facing a wall with his hand on his back until he guesses who strikes his hand.

² *Godek*, a riddle.

³ Knocked corn, barley shelled in a stone mortar, *knocking stone*, with a wooden mallet, *mel*.

the pieces surrounds the neck and covers the shoulders, the larger covers the middle and the narrow bits are anklets. The face is covered partially with a coloured handkerchief. The maskers go from house to house, and if possible accompanied with a fiddler, performing the most grotesque dances, expecting a dram or small gratuity. The custom is fast dying out ; it is not easy to procure a complete suit. The dresses exhibited were made in the town of Fetlar. [T. Edmondston, *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.* [1868-70], VIII, 471.] Shet.

White dresses ; all veiled ; caps about 18 inches in height made of straw twisted or plaited. Each cap terminated in three or four cones of a crescent shape, all pointing backwards and downwards with bunches of ribbons of every colour raying from the points of the cones. The spirits . . . had long staves with which they kept rapping the floor. Between them and the door stood one as black as 'Hornie'. [R. M. Ferguson ; *Rambles etc.* (1884), p. 92.] Ork.

Scuddler and Judas. The leader of the gang was known by the name of *Scuddler* while the one with the Satanic appearance is called *Judas*. [*Ibid.*, p. 93.] *Ibid.*

NOVEMBER

1st

I. Name, Hallowmas. See October 31st.

3rd

I. Name. Solomon's Even. [*P.S.A., Scotland*, X, p. 716.] Shet.

A superstition of ill-omen connected with this day. [Edmondston, *Glossary*, in *County Folk-Lore*, III, p. 196.] *Ibid.*

5th

V. 1. † On the 5th of November the children here go from door to door with a turnip cut and painted to represent a human face, and carried on a short stick, begging 'A ha'p'ny to burn me pope'. I have no knowledge of this custom in any other part of Scotland. [*N. & Q.*, 10th series, X, p. 434.] Stromness, Ork.

11th

I. Name, Martinmas.

V. g. Fisher- and Sea-men, hunting seals. It was usual for a sloop to go once a year, about Martinmas, to the small isle of rock of Souls Kerry, which lies to the W.N.W., about ten leagues distant, and there kill seals which resort to that rock in great numbers. (The practice abandoned after a disastrous shipwreck.) [*O.S.A.*, XVI, p. 436.]

Sandwick and Stromness, Ork.

V. m. Cattle were killed and salted down for winter use. [Robt. Cowie, *Shetland, etc.* (1871), p. 143.] Shet.

IX. Guisers at Martinmas. Straw suits are still in some parts of Scotland worn by the peasantry in order to disguise themselves when going from house to house at . . . Martinmas. (See Hallowmas.) [T. Edmondston, *Proc. Soc. Ant. Sc.* [1868-70], VIII, 471.] Shet.

XIII. Business transactions. For tenure the term of entry is Martinmas. [*N.S.A.*, XV, p. 146.] Ork.

13th

I. Name. St Magnus' Day. Jakobsen's Dictionary gives a different date.

III. St Lucy, 4th cent. ; suffered under Diocletian. The body of Earl Magnus was set over the altar at Christ's Kirk, Birsay, on St Lucia's day. Cf. April 16, above. [*The Orkneyinga Saga*. Trans. by A. B. Taylor (1936), p. 220.] Ork.

Traditions of St Magnus. S. Ronaldshay. Near the old fabric of our Lady's church there is a stone lying, about 4 foot long and a foot broad, but narrower and round at the two ends, upon the surface of which there is the print of two feet, concerning which the superstitious People have a tradition that St Magnus, when he could not get a boat on a time to carry him over Pightland Firth, took this stone, and setting his feet thereupon, passed the Firth safely, and left the stone in this church. . . . (St Magnus) was seen riding through Aberdeen giving the first account of the defeat of the English at Bannockburn and afterwards was seen going over Pightland Firth. [Rev. J. Brand, *A brief Description of Orkney and Shetland*, pp. 91, 2.] Ork.

DECEMBER

17th

I. Name ; Sow Day.

V. m. Food and drink. In a part of the parish of Sandwick, every family that has a herd of swine, kills a sow on the 17th day of December, and thence it is called Sow Day. There is no tradition as to the origin of this practice. [*O.S.A.*, XVI, p. 460. *County Folk-Lore*, III (1903), p. 196.] Ork.

18th (Night of 17th)

I. Name. Tulya's E'en. 'The Yules began with Tul-ya's E'en, which was seven days before Yule-day.' [Rev. Biot Edmondston and Jessie M. E. Saxby. *The Home of a Naturalist* (1888), p. 136.] Shet.

V. Observances. e. *Farm Customs.* On that night (Tul-ya's E'en) the Trows received permission to leave their homes in the heart of the earth and dwell, if it so pleased them, above ground. . . . One of the most important of all Yuletide observances was the 'saining' required to guard life or property from the Trows. If the proper observances were omitted, the 'grey-folk' were sure to take advantage of the opportunity. At day-set on Tul-ya's E'en two straws were plucked from the stored provender and laid, in the form of a cross, at the steggie (steps in a stone wall) leading to the yard where the stacks of hay and corn etc. were kept. A hair from the tail of each cow or 'beast o' burden', was plaited together and fastened over the byre door and a 'lowing taand', (blazing peat) was carried through the barn and other out-houses' [*Ibid.*]

For power of straw and hair cf. Hallowe'en, *Scottish Cal. Customs*, III.

20th

I. Names. Boo-helly, Buhelli ; Helya's Night, or five days before Christmas.

V. e. Farm and byre. Boo-helly, the fifth day before Christmas, being a sort of holiday on which the future safety of the cows was supposed to depend. [Th. Edmondston, *Glossary of the*

Shetland and Orkney Dialect. Trans. of the Philological Society, 1866.] Shet.

V. m. Helya's night followed Tul-ya's e'en. On Helya's night milk brose was partaken of. Shet.

XII. Religious observance. On Helya's night . . . children were committed to the care of 'Midder Mary'. A Shetlander told me she remembered when she was a little child seeing this ceremony performed by her old grandmother. Minnie (grandmother) raise up frae the fire and gaed to the cradle where our infant was sleeping. She spread her hands over the cradle-head and said, loud out—

Mary Midder had de haund
Ower aboot for sleepin'-baund,
Had da lass and had da wife,
Had da bairn a' its life.
Mary Midder had de haund
Round da infants o' oor laund.

Then Minnie came to the bed and said the same ower us, who were pretending to be fast asleep ; and a' the time she was doing sae, auld da' (grandfather) was standing raking the peats back and fore upon the hearthstane and saying some words, but we never got to ken what it was he said.' [Rev. Biot Edmondston & Jessie M. E. Saxby, *The Home of a Naturalist*, (1888), pp. 137, 8.]

The remark is often made that ' we never got to ken what he said '. [Ed.]

21st (night of 20th)

I. Names. Tammasapta, Thammasmas E'en, five nights before Yule-day. Cf. p. 83.

V. a. *Work forbidden.* This evening was supposed to be peculiarly holy, no work was done after day-set, and—unlike all other evenings of Yule-tide—no amusements were allowed. The smallest deviation from what was considered orthodox on this occasion was sure to bring bad luck.

The very babe unborn
Cries oh, dul! dul!
For the breaking o' Thammasmass nicht,
Five nichts afore Yule.

[*County Folk-Lore*, III (1903), p. 197.]

Shet.—

22nd

I. Names. Catherine Mass, observed in Shetland. [*Pro. Soc. of Antiquaries of Scotland*, X (1874).] Shet.
 Torlesesaptan, the eve of St Thorlak's day.

23rd

I. Name. Todlessesday, commemorating St Thorlákr, consecrated bishop of Skalholt 1178; 'to this day regarded as the patron saint of Iceland.' See G. Turville-Petre and E. S. Olszweska, *The Life of Gudmund the Good*, pp. xivf (1942). References and his Saga in Vigfússon & York Powell *Origines Islandicae* (1905), pp. 455 f etc., and pp. 458-502.

I. Name. In Shetland 'Modra Night',¹ mother night; longest night and mother of all others. [J. Spence, *Ork. & Shet. Miscel.*, II, pp. 180 f.] Shet.

SUNDAY BEFORE CHRISTMAS

I. Name. † Byana's Sunday.²

V. c. Observances. *Fire, candles, etc.* The skull was carefully cleaned, a candle stuck in the eye-socket, and then it was laid aside for use later in the season. Shet.

V. m. Food and drink. That evening half a cow's head was boiled and eaten for supper. The fat skimmed off the water was made, with burstin (a kind of oatmeal), into brose. [Rev. Biot Edmondston and Jessie M. E. Saxby, *The Home of a Naturalist* (1888), p. 138.] Shet.

THE YULES

At last the 20th of December (O.S.) dawns. . . . The 'muckle wheel' is taken off the *butt* wall, and *cairds* and *knucks*, *sweeries* and *reels*, are laid aside for a season. The handmill is taken off the *sile* and turned upside down on the *looder*, lest during the *helly days* it should be driven *widder shins* by witch and warlock. The Yule peats are carried in, and a *reested* cow's head or sheep's head is laid in steep for the Byaena-Sunday *brose*. This is Tammasma E'en, and the day following is Tammasma Day, on which no manner of work can be done.

¹G. Turville-Petre asks whether this might not have meant originally Night of Mothers (*modra*, gen. pl.). Cf. A. S. *modra neht* mentioned by Bede and perhaps related to the O. N. *disablót*, celebrated at various times of year.

²O.N. *bena-Sunnudagr*; bene, a prayer, Sunday.

Ta shape or shu
 Ta bake or brew,
 Ta reel a pirm
 Or wind a clew,
 A lö soolpaltie
 Will tak you.

Even—

Da bairn i' da midder's wime
 'Ill mak' woefu' dol,
 If wark be wrought on Tammasmas night,
 Five nights afore Yule.

[John Spence, *Shetland Folk-Lore* (1899), pp. 196, 7.] Shet.

24th

I. Names. Höku-nott, midwinter-night. [Written also hoggunott and erroneously explained as slaughter-night. Ed.]

Trolla night; this was the night before Christ when the trolls were out in force (obs.) According to old superstition the trolls were out in great numbers and near people's houses. Everything thrown out of doors in the evening was taken away by the trolls at night. [J. Jakobsen, *Ordbog etc.*] Shet.

IX. Guising and mummimg. A number of men enter the room dressed in a fantastic manner, their inner clothes being concealed by a white shirt as a surtout, which is confined at the waist-band by a short petticoat formed of loose straw that reaches to the knee.

The whole are under the controul of a director named a *scudler*, who is distinguished from his comrades by a very high straw cap, the top of which is ornamented with ribbon. He is the proper *arbiter elegantiarum* of his party, regulating their movements and the order in which they should alternately dance with the females assembled. [S. Hibbert, *Desc. of the Shetland Islands* (1822), p. 560.] Shet.

With the outset of winter, the ingenuous youths of Lerwick commence preparation for Yule, taking care to observe the strictest secrecy. On Christmas Eve, the 4th January—for the old style is still observed—the children go *a guizing*, that is to say, disguising themselves in the most fantastic and gaudy costumes, they parade the streets, and infest the houses and shops, begging for the wherewithal to carry on their Christmas amusements. [*County Folk-Lore*, III, p. 203.] Shet.

25th

I. Name. Yule. The name of Yule is still retained in Shetland . . . ; the observance is well understood and scrupu-

lously recognised. . . . It is not possible to trace the time when these names (Yule and others) and their allusions were first introduced. [Ar. Edmondston, M.D., *View of the Zetland Is.* (1809), I, p. 135.] Shet.

II. Sayings, etc. There is a saying in the nature of a simile which I have heard in Shetland, viz., *as bare as the birk* (birch) *on Yöl-dae*. Another more common saying *as bare as the back of Yöl*. [J. A. Teit, in *Orkney & Shetland Miscell.*, Viking Club, I, p. 92.] Shet.

The Yule Star

Da flighting wife 'ill close her mooth
When da Yule Star is idda Sooth.

As the Pole Star is everlastingly faithful to its place in the north, that couplet is intended to show that a scolding woman can never be cured of her besetting sin. And if you wished to declare your determination not to do a certain thing you said, 'I'll do that when the Yule Star is in the South'. [Jessie M. E. Saxby, Viking Club, I, p. 228.] Shet.

V. a. Yule day is held in great veneration by all the peasants of Zetland (Shetland). No individual will then engage in any kind of labour, and if a drop of spirits can be had by any sacrifice, it must be had to hail the morn of that happy day.

[Ar. Edmondston, M.D., *View of the Zetland Islands* (1809), II, p. 66.] Shet.

V. a. and g. During that (Yule) week no person ought to prosecute their ordinary employment; the penalty for doing so is bad luck for a year. . . . Some fishermen went to sea on the fourth day of Yule, and the first thing they brought up on their lines was a hideous monster—half fish, half horse. This creature told them that—

Man wha fished in Yule week
Fortune never mair did seek.

[Rev. B. Edmondston and Jessie M. E. Saxby, *The Home of a Naturalist* (1888), p. 144.] Shet.

V. a. *Work forbidden*. Only the most necessary part of domestic work, with due attention to the bestial on the farm is done on these (Yule) days. [N.S.A., Orkney, p. 127.] Westray, Ork.

No work of any kind was done upon Yule-day, for the old rhyme said—

'Nedder bake nor brew,
Shape nor shew,

Upon gude Yule,
Else muckle dul
Will be dy share
Dis year and mair.'

A girl who, 'wishful to show contempt for auld ways (and moreover needing sair to finish a pair o' socks that the laird was to buy frae her), took ta her wires [knitting-neededles] upon Yule-day. A' folk telled her to be wise, and some said she was see! And, puir lass! she never saw another Yule.' [Edmondston and Saxby, *The Home of a Naturalist* (1888), p. 136.] Shet.

V. b. The house was carefully tidied, 'no unkirsn things left in sight', and all soiled water thrown away. All locks were opened, a lamp was left burning all night, and an 'iron blade' was laid on a table near the door. *Ibid.*

V. b. c. Each member of the family washed their whole person, and donned a clean (if possible, new) garment, in which they slept that night. When the hands or feet were put into the water 'three living coals were dropped into the water, else the Trows took the power o' the feet or hands'. [Two paragraphs quoted from Edmondston and Saxby in *County Folk-Lore*, III, p. 198.] *Ibid.*

With us anyone who did not have something new for the occasion (Yule) was called a *jule-yaager*. [Communicated by W. W. Ratter, Lerwick, 27th Dec. 1943.] *Ibid.*

V. b. *The quern*. In Shetland the quern is turned 'with the sun', while in Iceland it is turned 'withershins', or against the sun. . . . In Shetland, during Yule, the upper stone was removed to prevent the witches turning it withershins. [A. W. Johnston, *Saga Book of the Viking Club*.] *Ibid.*

Enjoyment. One custom in this parish (Westray), and common to Orkney at large, is that of allowing the servants four or five days liberty at Christmas to enjoy themselves. [N.S.A., Orkney, p. 127.] Ork.

V. c. One o'clock on Yule morning having struck, the young men turn out in large numbers, dressed in the coarsest of garments, and, at the double-quick march, drag huge tar barrels through the town, shouting and cheering as they go, or blowing loud blasts with their 'louder horns'.¹ The tar barrel simply consists of several—say from four to eight—tubs filled with tar and chips, placed on a platform of wood. It is dragged by means of a chain, to which scores of jubilant youths readily

¹ O.N. *Lúdr*, a trumpet.

yoke themselves. They have recently been described by the burgh officer of Lerwick as 'fiery chariots, the effect of which is truly grand and terrific'. In a Christmas morning the dark streets of Lerwick are generally lighted up by the bright glare, and its atmosphere blackened by the dense smoke, of six or eight tar barrels in succession. [*County Folk-Lore*, III, pp. 203 f.]
Lerwick, Shet.

V. e. Farm and byre. Before daylight on Yule morning the gudeman of the house got up and lit the candle which had been stuck in the eye-socket of the cow's skull (on Byana Sunday). Then he proceeded with this unique candlestick to the byre and fed the beasts, giving to all a little better food than usual, which they were expected to eat by the light of that candle. [*The Home of a Naturalist* (1888), p. 139.] Shet.

Every house has the practice of killing one (sheep) on Yule . . . eve which goes by the name of the Yule sheep. And on the forenoon of that day, there is a great gathering at a certain place of all the men and sheep in the island, for the selection of the several victims. [*O.S.A.*, XV, p. 110.] Ork.

Yule in Shetland was usually observed on January 6th, the last and greatest day of 'the Yules', and equivalent to December 26th O.S. [Ed.] Shet.

V. g. . . I have collected a number of superstitions which still linger here. Fishermen count it unlucky . . . to go fishing on Christmas Day. [*N. & Q.*, 10th series, XII, p. 483 (Dec. 18, 1909).] Stromness, Ork.

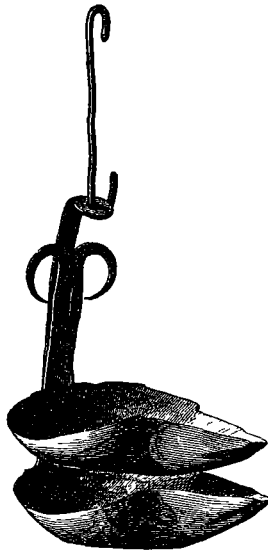
See also above, **V a.**

V. m. Food and Drink Bummacks. The feuars lived in terms of social intercourse and familiarity with their tenants, for maintaining and perpetuating of which annual entertainments, consisting of the best viands which the farms produced, were cheerfully given by the tenants to their landlords during the Christmas holy days. These entertainments [were] called bummacks. [*O.S.A.*, XV, p. 393.] Stronsay & Eday, Ork.

It used to be a custom in Orkney to bake sowan scones on Christmas Eve which were presented to the members of the household on the following morning. Whoever was first out of bed usually brought the scones to the others who were still in bed. This corresponds to the Highland custom of giving sowans and butter the first thing on Christmas morning. [Mlan MS.] Ork.

The master of the house has to keep up a well-furnished table for all his servants at this season. [*N.S.A.*, XV, p. 127.] Ork.

PLATE II



A SHETLAND KOLLIE

from the Catalogue of the National Museum of Scotland, 1892

A lamp which is filled with oil, known in Shetland
as a Kollie, in Scotland as a Crusie

Food and drink. The next thing the gudeman did (on Yule¹ morning) was to go round to the folk of the house with drams, and even the bairns were bound to taste, 'if nae mair', while to all he said—

Yule gude and Yule gear
Follow de trew da year.

Breakfast was eaten by artificial light, and on this occasion many a bit of household candle was produced by the youngsters who had secretly stored those morsels for months that they might have a fine lighting up on Yule morning. [Edmonston and Saxby, *The Home of a Naturalist* (1888), p. 124.] Shet.

'Whipcoll' made only for Yule. The yolk of an egg is beaten with pounded sugar, thick sweet cream being poured slowly on and stirred in, the whole seasoned with a generous amount of some potent spirit, brandy or rum if possible. [J. M. E. Saxby, *Shetland Trad. Lore* (1932), p. 172.] Shet.

Yule-brunics were made of rye-meal and a fat of some kind; they were made round and the edges pinched 'to represent the sun's rays'. Every member of a household was entitled to a Yule-brunie. [*Ibid.*, p. 170.] Shet.

Another practice peculiar to this place is, that of observing punctually those days in the Roman calendar, on which eating and drinking are practised with more liberality than usual. [*N.S.A.*, Orkney, p. 127.] Ork.

Though the family might be very poor indeed, they always contrived to have a piece of 'flesh-meat' to cook on Yule e'en. After the ordinary bread was baked, a round oatcake was kneaded for each child, differing in size as the young ones differed in age. These cakes were pinched into points round the outer edge, and a hole was made in the centre, and they were named emphatically *the* Yule-cakes. [*County Folk-Lore*, III, p. 198.] Shet.

Drinking a toast. During the feast one of the leading toasts was called 'minnie'. [O.N. *minnie*], meaning the cup of remembrance. [J. Napier, *Folklore Beliefs in the West of Scot.* (1879), p. 154.] Shet.

V. o. *A tale of animals.* † Southay . . . is now uncultivated, but formerly it was very rich in cattle. Everyone here finished their life in one day, in the same manner—this is no story, but a very true relation, and worthy to be noted by Christian men. At the approach of the festival of our Saviour Jesus Christ, when

¹ See note on Yule, V c. Shetland, opposite.

they held it, since the church was insufficient for them, they went to a neighbouring island, and proceeding in a boat, both young and old, a sudden storm having arisen, whilst the waters were raging beyond measure, they were drowned. Whereupon indeed the cattle, oxen, sheep, calf, pigs, dogs, puppies and every living thing there precipitated themselves into the sea, with wonderful ferocity, and were drowned, which indeed was true ; no one has lived there to this day. [*Descriptio Insularum Orchadiarum.*, Anno 1529 per me Joannen Ben in *Geogr. Collections*, III, p. 313, translation on p. 323.] Ork.

VI. *Trows visible.* There was once a woman in the island of Papa Stoor who every Yule Night when the moon shone would stand on the *Brig-stanes* (stepping-stones) in front of the house, and watch the Trows as they danced in the green sward close to the seashore. Sometimes she invited her husband to see the strange performance, but he never could behold the Trowie dance until he either gripped his wife's hand or placed his foot on hers. [John Nicholson. *Folk-Tales & Legends of Shetland* (1920), p. 10.] Shet.

Trows active. With the approach of Yule the Trows became more active and perhaps more aggressive. . . . Legs of mutton and pork ham often disappeared in mysterious fashion on Yule e'en should the householder retire without taking the precaution of safeguarding these from the attention of the hill-folk. The protection required was either a steel knife or a fork stuck into the flesh. [*Ibid.*, p. 12.] Shet.

Woe betide the man, woman, or child who has forgotten to be sained, and by such means given the Trows power to do as they will. . . . Trows are excessively fond of dancing and always try to join the revels (at Yule), but this they can only do in the disguise of a mortal. They kill the unsained and use their bodies as the necessary disguise. [Edmondston and Saxby, *The Home of a Naturalist* (1888), p. 141.] Shet.

Legend of cairn of Helyawater. † [There is a cairn on an islet in Helyawater on which, tradition says, dwelt a viking.] It is said that the Yarl was buried there, and by his grave dwelt the raven. One wild Yule night a lad dared the spells of evil and tried to reach the cairn. He was drowned in Helyawater, and the raven remained master of the situation. . . . Helyawater lies apart from all tracks, and the Highlander remarks that thankfully when he has to cross those hills after dusk. [Jessie M. E. Saxby, *Birds of Omen in Shet.* (1893), pp. 14, 15.] Shet.

Yule traditions of the Trows. Once a merry young couple

desired to share in the merriment in a neighbour's house one Yule evening. They did not wish to be encumbered by their little ones, so they bribed the boys (two in number, aged four and five) with extra cakes and sweets to go early to bed, and as soon as the little ones' eyes were closed in slumber, the youthful parents stole away to join the dancers in the next house, which was not much more than a stone's-throw from their dwelling.

The big barn had been cleared for the dancing, and after a few hearty reels the couple adjourned to the 'ben-end o' the hoose' to partake of refreshment. Shortly after they disappeared there glided into the barn two tiny creatures, scantily attired, with wide-open eyes, bare feet, and smiling lips, which said never a word. A shout arose from the youths and maidens assembled, and the older folks laughed, while one fisherman called out, 'Come awa' my lambs, and ye sall hae a reel as weel as the best o' wis'. The fiddler struck up the 'Shoals o' Foula', and the two little uninvited guests tripped merrily up and down, their small bare feet keeping wonderful time and executing such marvellous steps that the merry-makers declared they must have been taught by the Trows. When the reel was at its height, the dancing fast and furious, the young mother returned to the barn, and no sooner did she catch sight of the tiny couple than she exclaimed: 'Guid save me, the bairns!' No trow can remain visible when a pious word is spoken. No sooner had the 'Guid save me' passed her lips than the little strangers vanished through the crowd at the door. Of course, some jokes were tossed at the mother, who, however, declared that she had left her boys asleep in bed, and never dreamt of their following her. There was snow on the ground, and snow was falling, although it was a moonlight evening. An ancient dame muttered: 'The lambs 'ill take cauld'—a remark which of course touched the young mother's heart, and she hastened after her children. But when she reached her own house they were not there. No, nor were they to be found in any neighbouring house. And for half an hour the parents and all the merry party searched for the children, but without success. Then folk began to whisper to one another of the wonderful steps the little couple had danced, and of the curious silence they maintained though evidently enjoying the dance. At last an aged woman asked the weeping mother if she had 'looked weel to da saining?'

'I never thought of that,' cried the terrified girl; and then 'a' folk kent it was Trows that had ta'en the form o' Jock's peerie boys'.

There was no more dancing that night. 'No, nor for many Yules after in that toon', for next morning the baby boys were found dead in each other's arms in a great, soft snowdrift which filled a ravine not many hundred yards from their home. And every one affirmed that the calamity occurred through the parents having omitted to *sain* their offspring on Yule e'en.

One Yule a large party had assembled at the Moolapund, 'after the evening was half spent they found that the drink was aboot done, for double the number o' folk had come than was expected.' 'Lads,' said the man of the house, 'some o' you will hae to gang ower the hill for some liquor.' 'And ye'll meet the Trows about the Moola-burn!' cried a saucy damsel.

"Is du no feared ta speak o' the grey-folk?" whispered a youth in her ear. 'No' I,' said the lass.

'Then come wi' me to the Moola-burn,' he said, "and see them linking ower the braes." . . . As they left the house an old woman muttered: 'Gude preserve them; it was a fule thing o' Breeta [the young woman's name] to speak like yon about them that is oot this night.'

Long, long did the folks wait, and many were the wrathful words uttered at Josey's delay. At last he came—and came alone. Nay, more, he reeled in, flourishing two empty whisky bottles and shouting madly: 'The Trows hae got the drink, and they've got the lass as weel!' . . . Vainly did the men strive to elicit information from Josey. He was utterly mad with drink, and could only shout, 'The Trows hae taen my lass!'

'And' (said she who told the story) 'Josey spakd the wurd o' truth for a' that; for puir Breeta was lying in the Moola-burn, weet and wan, when her brithers fand her. She had in her hand a bulwand, and that ye ken is what the grey-folk use for horses. She was dead, puir lass, and a' for speaking lightly o' them that has power at sich times. As for Josey, he never did mair gude frae that nicht, and afore the Yules cam' round again he was dead too.' [Edmondston and Saxby, *The Home of a Naturalist* (1888), pp. 136 ff.] Shet.

The islanders say that about a hundred years ago there was a species of supernatural beings in Papa Stour so numerous and even dangerous, that a person could not go beyond the 'town-dyke' after twelve o'clock at noon. At Yule time and at weddings they would collect in such numbers as to check the progress of the strongest men, and sometimes bruize and kill them. [J. T. Reid, *Art Rambles in Shetland* (1869), p. 24.] Shet.

A right shrewd farmer told me he observed on a knowe,

called Burying,¹ the Broch of Burrian in Harray (a heap of ruins), near his house, in Harray on Christmas day, a large company dancing and frolicking, but on his walking up they all disappeared. He was very ill pleased when I attempted to persuade him it could be nothing but the effects of the cakes and strong ale he had for his Christmas breakfast (*the custom here*).

[Letter from George Low to Mr Paton, 22nd Dec. 1773. George Low, *A Tour through Orkney and Shetland* (1879). Intro. p. XLI.]

Trial of Katherine Jones dochter, 1616. She saw the 'Trowis ryse out of the kirkyeard of Hildiswick and Holiecross Kirk of Eschenes, and on the hill called Greinfaill'. They came to any house where there was 'feasting or great mirrines, and specialle at Yule'. [J. G. Dalrymple, *The Darker Superstitions of Scotland* (1835), p. 532.] Shet.

IX. Long before daylight, the fiddlers present themselves at the doors of the houses, playing a tune called the *day-dawn*, the interesting association of which thrills every soul with delight. This tune has long been consecrated to Yule day, and is never played on any other occasion. [Arthur Edmondston, M.D., *View of the Zetland Islands* (1809), II, pp. 66, 7.]

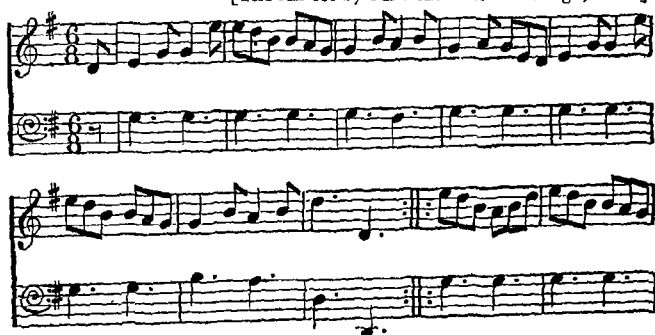
Music for Day Dawn on p. 37.

IX. A Yule Reel Air.

THE FOULA REEL

Foula, Shetland

[The Air set by Miss KEMP of Edinburgh, 1822.]



¹ This mound is known as the 'Broch of Burrian'. Its exploration has yielded a rich collection of antiquities which are now in the National Museum in Edinburgh. [Ed.]



Words :

Weel, since ye are welcome to Yule, up wi't Lightfoot, link it awa', boys ;
Send for a fiddler, play up Foola Reel ; we'll skip as light as a maw, boys.

Chorus.

The Shaalds of Foola will pay for a'—up wi't Lightfoot, link it awa', boys ;
The Shaalds of Foola will pay for a', the Shaalds will pay for a', boys.

The Awens are amang the cows in the byre—up wi't Lightfoot, link it awa', boys ;
Link up the pot, and put on a gude fire ; we'll sit till cocks do crow, boys.

The Shaalds of Foola, &c.

Now for a light, and a pot of good beer—up wi't Lightfoot, link it awa', boys ;
We'll drink a gude fishing against the next year, and the Shaalds will pay for a', boys.

The Shaalds of Foola, &c.

[Hibbert, *Shetland*, pp. 563, 564, quoted in *County Folk-Lore*, III, pp. 248-249.]

Dancing. Dancing was the chief amusement of the women on Yule Day. [Edmondston and Saxby, *The Home of a Naturalist* (1888), p. 141.] Shet.

After a ball on Christmas night (1805) in my house at Scarvister in Sandsting parish, I travelled fully twenty miles to play the fiddle to a wedding party near the manse of Tingwall. [Per Gilbert Goudie ; Sinclair Thomson in *Ork. & Shet. Miscell.*, I, p. 170.] Shet.

IX. *Guising.* The ancient customs of guising or masquerading—a feature peculiar to the observance of Yule-tide in

Shetland—is still kept up with some of its accustomed spirit. The streets of Lerwick during the morning, to some extent, present the appearance of a continental town during a carnival. [E. J. Guthrie, *Old Scottish Customs* (1888), p. 198.] Shet.

On the appearance of daybreak, at six a.m., the morning revellers put off their coarse garments—well begrimed by this time [after dragging blazing tar-barrels, see V c. above]—and in turn become guizards. They assume every imaginable form of Costume—those of soldiers, sailors, Highlanders, Spanish Chevaliers, &c. Thus disguised, they either go in pairs, as man and wife, or in larger groups, and proceed to call on their friends, to wish them the compliments of the season. Formerly, these adolescent guizards used to seat themselves in crates, and accompanied by fiddlers, were dragged through the town. The crate, however, has for some years fallen into disuse. After the revels of the morning, they generally grow pretty languid ere evening arrives. Old New Year's Day (12th January), is kept similarly to Christmas, but the rejoicings it calls forth are usually on a smaller scale. [*County Folk-Lore*, III, p. 204.] Lerwick, Shet.

IX. *The Sword Dance of Papa Stour.* This dance has been discussed by many students of European dances, who assign it, some to Scandinavia, others to the sword-dance pattern of England; this latter affinity is easily traced, although the ritual death and the healing doctor are both absent at Papa Stour. If it found its way to the islands from England then its route is a difficulty, for it is not recorded as a seasonal dance in the geographical area of Scotland, while it is connected by the islanders with the Scandinavian festival of Up-Helly-a. An intelligible suggestion is that it found its way to the far north under the influence of the Scottish Earls. These men were in touch with the gaieties of Court festivals, and we know that sword dances and mummers' plays were popular features in dramatic performances at the English Court, whose fashions were not without influence in Scotland. We find a sword dance, indeed, performed for royal pleasure at Perth, on July 8th, 1633. This was danced to the king on the morning of his arrival by brethren of the Glovers' Craft Guild. Immediately after a sermon the king returned to his lodging and went down to the garden. In modern English the description runs—'His Majesty's chair being set upon the wall next the water of Tay, whereupon was a floating stage of timber clad about with birks. Upon the which for his Majesty's welcome and entry

thirteen of our brethren of this our calling of glovers with green caps, silver strings, red ribbons, white shoes, and bells about their legs, short swords for thrusting (scheiring raperis) in their hands, and all other accoutrement, danced our sword dance with many different knots. And allapalla zesse (a la palla or balla zesse?) five being under and five above upon their shoulders, three of them dancing through their feet and about them drinking wine and breaking glass. Which (God be praised) was acted and done without hurt or scaith to any'. [Transcript from a MS at the Glovers' Hall, Perth, made by Anna J. Mill for her *Mediaeval Plays in Scot.* (1927), p. 271. See also *Sc. N. & Q.*, series iii, vol. IV (1926), p. 24.]

A sword dance is described by Olaus Magnus. The dance was not at this time seasonal (1555) and but for this reference nothing would have been known of it in N. Scandinavia ; it is similar in some points to the dance of Papa Stour. The Latin text is quoted by Sir E. K. Chambers (*The Mediaeval Stage*) and a translation prefaces the description given below from the note in Sir Walter Scott's novel.

The sword dance as known in modern Scotland is a step dance performed over swords on the ground, not held in the hand. There are references to sword dances of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the Western Isles, where the swords were held in the hand for thrust and parry, but without the 'knots' and difficult figures described at Perth and at Papa Stour.

The Seven Champions of Christendom who appear in the dance do not seem to have been known under that name before 1576 ; from their incongruous attributes in the Papa Stour dance Sir E. K. Chambers offers his surmise that they have here usurped the place of more primitive heroes.

Richard Wolfram, *Schwertanz und Männerbund* (1935) has undertaken an intensive study of the Papa Stour Dance and claims to find its counterpart in Germany ; he refers to R. Willan, *Ancient words used in the West Riding of Yorkshire in Archaeologica* (1814), xvii, p. 155, who tells of a 'Rapier Dance' in W. Yorks., where heroes with names corresponding to those of the Papa Stour dance are introduced one after the other as there. He notes that Shetland had long kept up intercourse with Norway, especially with Bergen, but recognizes that the sword dance of North England is nearly related to the dance he is studying. Cecil Sharp, *Sword Dance*, I, p. 17, finds that the dance with lifted swords was once known in Fife and the Hebrides, as is stated above ; see also Douglas Kennedy,

Journal of the English Folk Dance Society, 2nd series, No. 3 (1930), p. 22. [Ed.]

Earlier accounts are in the following extracts :

The Shetlanders still retained, in the last century, many of the customs of their Scandinavian forefathers. . . . The traditions and songs handed down by their forefathers still lived among the people, whose poets and poetical feeling have been celebrated from the ancient times. It was customary to revive the memory of former days by festal assemblies, in which the youth of both sexes danced to songs (visechs) and ballads, as they did in ancient times throughout the North, and as is still the custom in the Faroe Isles. At Yule-time (Christmas), which was the chief festival, and the beginning of which was always announced at daybreak by playing an ancient melody called the day-dawn (Dan : Daggay), all kinds of merriment took place. A favourite amusement was the so-called *Sword-dance*, the origin of which may be traced with sufficient certainty to the times of the heathens. The Vikings were frequently very dexterous in playing with naked swords ; throwing several at once into the air without allowing them to fall to the ground. This practice was easily converted into a dance, performed by several men with drawn swords ; and consisting of many windings and figures calculated to develop a dexterous agility, which, in those warlike times, must naturally have excited a lively interest among the spectators. Later in the middle ages the Sword Dance in the Shetland Isles lost by degrees the wildness of its character, the number of dancers being limited to seven, representing the 7 Champions of Christendom, viz. St James of Spain, St Denis of France, St Anthony of Italy, St David of Wales, St Patrick of Ireland, St Andrew of Scotland, all under the command of St George of England, who both opened and closed the dance by reciting some English verses appropriate to the occasion. All this, however, is now much changed. In the farthest island towards the west, that of Papa Stour (Papey Stoeirri) the great Pap Island, in contradistinction to the neighbouring Papa little (Papey litla), a last shadow of the old warlike sword-dance is occasionally to be seen. Instead, however, of being clothed in armour or shirts of mail, the dancing knights have shirts of sackcloth ; and in place of huge swords they brandish straightened iron hoops, stripped from some herring-cask. The old Norwegian songs are no longer heard. [Worsace, *Account of the Danes & Norwegians in England* (1852), pp. 227-228.] Shet.

The Shetland Sword Dance. (Stated by S. Hibbert, *Description, etc.* as taking place at Christmas) :

At Scalloway my curiosity was gratified by an account of the sword-dance, now almost lost, but still practised in the Island of Papa, belonging to Mr Scott. There are eight performers, seven of whom represent the Seven Champions of Christendom, who enter one by one with their swords drawn, and are presented to the eighth personage, who is not named. Some rude couplets are spoken (in *English*, not *Norse*) containing a sort of panegyric upon each champion as he is presented. They then dance a sort of cotillion, as the ladies described it, going through a number of evolutions with their swords. One of my three Mrs Scotts readily promised to procure me the lines, the rhymes, and the form of the dance. . . .

I regret much that young Mr Scott was absent during my visit ; . . . probably I might have interested him in preserving the dance, by causing young persons to learn it. A few years since a party of Papa-men came to dance the sword-dance at Lerwick as a public exhibition with great applause. . . . In a stall pamphlet, called the History of Buckshaven, Fife, it is said those fishers sprung from Danes, and brought with them their *War-Dance*, or *Sword-Dance*, and a rude wooden cut of it is given. [Sir Walter Scott's Diary, printed in Lockhart's *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott* (1887), III, p. 162.]

To the Primate's (Olaus Magnus') account of the sword-dance, I am able to add the words sung or chanted on occasion of this dance, as it is still performed in Papa Stour, a remote island of Zetland, where alone the custom keeps its ground. It is . . . a species of play or mystery, in which the Seven Champions of Christendom make their appearance. . . . This dramatic curiosity was most kindly procured for my use by Mr Scott of Hazlar Hospital [died 1875], son of my friend Mr Scott of Mewbie [Melbie], Shetland. Dr Hibbert has, in his description of the Zetland Islands, given an account of the sword-dance, but somewhat less full than the following :

A description of the dance in James Wilson's *A Voyage round the coasts of Scotland and the Isles*, II (1842) quotes words identical with those of Hibbert, and agrees in the account of the figures. The performance was by special request at Papa Stour, on August 30th 1841, witnessed by J. Wilson. Dr Robert Cowie, in *Shetland* (1879), stated that the Sword Dance had been performed during winter evenings at Papa Stour until within the last twenty years [1859]. (See A. W. Johnston, in *Ork. & Shet. Old Lore* (1912) who prints a version of the words, a

combination of the versions given by Scott and Hibbert, with special note of small differences in the words and in the instructions to the dancers.)

Words used as a prelude to the Sword Dance. . . .

PERSONAE DRAMATIS

(*Enter Master, in the character of St George.*)

Brave gentles all, within this boor,¹
If ye delight in any sport,
Come see me dance upon this floor,
Which to you all shall yield comfort.
Then shall I dance in such a sort,
As possible I may or can ;
You, minstrel-man, play me a porte,²
That I on this floor may prove a man.

(*He bows, and dances in a line.*)

Now have I danced with heart and hand,
Brave gentles all, as you may see,
For I have been tried in many a land,
As yet the truth can testify ;
In England, Scotland, Ireland, France, Italy, and Spain,
Have I been tried with that good sword of steel.

(*Draws, and flourishes.*)

Yet, I deny that ever a man did make me yield ;
For in my body there is strength,
As by my manhood may be seen ;
And I, with that good sword of length,
Have oftentimes in perils been,
And over champions I was king.
And by the strength of this right hand,
Once on a day I kill'd fifteen,
And left them dead upon the land.
Therefore, brave minstrel, do not care,
But play to me a porte most light
That I no longer do forbear,
But dance in all these gentles' sight ;
Although my strength makes you abased,
Brave gentles all, be not afraid,

¹ *Boor*—so spelt to accord with the vulgar pronunciation of the word *bower*.

² This word is known as indicating a piece of music on the bagpipe.

For here are six champions, with me **staid**,
All by my manhood I have raised.

(*He dances.*)

Since I have danced, I think it best
To call my brethren in your sight,
That I may have a little rest,
And they may dance with all their might ;
With heart and hand as they are knights,
And shake their sword of steel so bright,
And shew their main strength on this floor,
For we shall have another bout
Before we pass out of this boor,
Therefore, brave minstrel, do not care
To play to me a porte most light,
That I no longer do forbear,
But dance in all these gentles' sight.

(*He dances, and then introduces his knights as under.*)

Stout James of Spain, both tried and stour,¹
Thine acts are known full well indeed ;
And champion Dennis, a French knight,
Who stout and bold is to be seen ;
And David, a Welshman born,
Who is come of noble blood ;
And Patrick also, who blew the horn,
An Irish knight amongst the wood.
Of Italy, brave Anthony the good,
And Andrew of Scotland King ;
St George of England, brave indeed,
Who to the Jews wrought muckle tinte.²
Away with this!—Let us come to sport,
Since that ye have a mind to war,
Since that ye have this bargain sought,
Come let us fight and do not fear.
Therefore, brave minstrel, do not care
To play to me a porte most light,
That I no longer do forbear,
But dance in all these gentles' sight.

(*He dances and advances to JAMES of Spain.*)

Stout James of Spain, both tried and stour,
Thine acts are known full well indeed,

¹ *Stour*—great.

² *Muckle tinte*—much loss or harm ; so in MS.

Present thyself within our sight,
 Without either fear or dread.
 Count not for favour or for feid,
 Since of thy acts thou hast been sure ;
 Brave James of Spain, I will thee lead,
 To prove thy manhood on this floor.

(JAMES dances.)

Brave champion Dennis, a French knight,
 Who stout and bold is to be seen,
 Present thyself here in our sight,
 Thou brave French knight,
 Who bold hast been ;
 Since thou such valiant acts hast done,
 Come let us see some of them now,
 With courtesy, thou brave French knight,
 Draw out thy sword of noble hue.

(DENNIS dances, while the others retire to a side.)

Brave David a bow must string, and with awe
 Set up a wand upon a stand,
 And that brave David will cleave in twa.¹

(DAVID dances solus.)

Here is, I think, an Irish knight,
 Who does not fear, or does not fright,
 To prove thyself a valiant man,
 As thou hast done full often bright ;
 Brave Patrick, dance, if that thou can.

(He dances.)

Thou stout Italian, come thou here ;
 Thy name is Anthony, most stout ;
 Draw out thy sword that is most clear,
 And do thou fight without any doubt ;
 Thy leg thou shake, thy neck thou lout,²
 And shew some courtesy on this floor,
 For we shall have another bout,
 Before we pass out of this boor.
 Thou kindly Scotsman, come thou here,
 Thy name is Andrew of Fair Scotland ;
 Draw out thy sword that is most clear,
 Fight for thy king with thy right hand ;

¹ Something is evidently amiss or omitted here. David probably exhibited some feat of archery.

² *Lout*—to bend or bow down, pronounced *loot*, as *doubt* is *doot* in Scotland.

And aye as long as thou canst stand,
Fight for thy king with all thy heart ;
And then, for to confirm his hand,
Make all his enemies for to smart.

(*He dances.*) (*Music begins.*)

FIGUIR. [*sic*]

The six stand in rank with their swords reclining on their shoulders. The Master (St George) dances, and then strikes the sword of James of Spain, who follows George, then dances, strikes the sword of Dennis, who follows behind James. In like manner the rest—the music playing—swords as before. After the six are brought out of rank, they and the Master form a circle, and hold the swords point and hilt. This circle is danced round twice. The whole, headed by the Master, pass under the swords held in a vaulted manner. They jump over the swords. This naturally places the swords across, which they disentangle by passing under their right sword. They take up the seven swords, and form a circle, in which they dance round.

The Master runs under the sword opposite, which he jumps over backwards. The others do the same. He then passes under the right-hand sword, which the others follow, in which position they dance, until commanded by the Master, when they form a circle, and dance round as before. They then jump over the right-hand sword, by which means their backs are to the circle, and their hands across their backs. They dance round in that form until the Master calls 'Loose', when they pass under the right sword, and are in a perfect circle.

The Master lays down his sword, and lays hold of the point of James's sword. He then turns himself, James, and the others into a clew. When so formed, he passes under out of the midst of the circle ; the others follow ; they vault as before. After several other evolutions, they throw themselves into a circle, with their arms across the breast. They afterwards form such figures as to form a shield of their swords, and the shield is so compact that the master and his knights dance alternately with this shield upon their heads. It is then laid down upon the floor. Each knight lays hold of their former points and hilts with their hands across, which disentangle by figures directly contrary to those that formed the shield. This finishes the Ballet.

EPILOGUE

Mars does rule, he bends his bows,
He makes us all agast ; [*sic*]
After the few hours that we stay here,
Venus will rule at last.
Farewell, farewell, brave gentles all,
That herein do remain,
I wish you health and happiness
Till we return again. (*Exeunt.*)

The manuscript from which the above was copied was transcribed from a *very old one*, by Mr William Henderson, jun. of Papa Stour in Zetland. Mr Henderson's copy is not dated but bears his own signature, and, from various circumstances, it is known to have been written about the year 1788. [Sir W. Scott, *The Pirate*, Note, K, p. 465. (Centenary Edition, XIII 1871).]

In 1926 Mr Alex Johnson published at Papa Stour an account of 'the old Shetland custom', written by a native of the island who had taken part in its performance. He states that prior to 1892 the sword dance had lapsed for a period of between 20 and 30 years. At that date, 1892, it had been usual for the young people of the island to meet at some agreed place for amusement during the long winter evenings. A certain crofter's cottage became a favourite meeting-place, where hospitality always awaited them and old Shetland melodies were played by the crofter on his violin. Here, in the winter of 1892-3, the sword dance was revived by seven enthusiasts under the guidance of their host, and performed before a gathering of visitors from every house on the island. As the dancers, seafaring men, left their homes, the sword dance lapsed again,—but only for a short time. Young men again met and practised the dance for performance before a local audience as before. By the winter of 1921-2 it had suffered 'a few years of complete extinction', but came to life once more when eight young men reproduced it from the description given by Sir Walter Scott. Again it lapsed, but in 1926 it was seen in full performance before a large gathering. Small variations have established themselves, but the revival is true to type, with the Seven Champions and the sword dance in their accustomed form. The description in Mr Johnson's pamphlet gives every detail,—with the faithfulness natural to accounts of folk-dances. [Published by the *Shetland Times* office, Lerwick.] Shet.

XI. Football.

Football was played on Yule-day. [A. W. Johnston, *Ork. & Shet. Miscell.*, I, p. 246.] Ork.

The game suppressed. On Christmas Day (a Lord's day) the service being at Burrik, the elders were ordered to 'tak special cair that no gaming be at football or other wanton plays, and to report'. None were found. [Session Record of South Ronaldshay and Burray, Orkney, Dec. 25, 1659 : quoted in *Church Life in S. Ronaldshay and Burray in the Seventeenth Century*, by Rev. J. B. Craven, D.D., p. 28.] Ork.

In Shetland at Yule there were no shows of any kind. Neither were there any fairs or wappinschaws. 'Highland Games' were unknown, and there never was such a thing as a meeting of athletes to contend for prizes and local fame ; neither were there ever any regattas or boat-races ; and the native youth were utterly ignorant of cricket, shinty, quoits, golf, and even curling. Almost the only out-of-door game known, or at least practised, was football,¹ in which boys and lads, and once in the year—on Yule-day—many middle-aged men. . . . engaged with splendid vigour and spirit. [Edmondston & Saxby, *The Home of a Naturalist* (1888), pp. 184, 5.]

XII. Festival. In the *Orkneyinga Saga* the Yule feast is mentioned several times, both in Shetland and in Orkney. In 1046 Earl Rognvald (Brúsa sonr) was gathering winter stores to Kirkwall, where he was sitting, and 'a little before Yule went with a large following to Papa Stronsay for malt, to be brewed for Yule'.

The Yule feasts of the later Earl Rognvald, nephew of St Magnus, are referred to as notable ; at these there were banquets, songs, and gifts, and they lasted for several days.

The tale of the feast of Earl Paul in his house at Orphir, Orkney, 1135 throws light on the nature of the Christian Yule feast of that time as celebrated in the North. This was the Earl who disputed the earldom with Rognvald, nephew of St Magnus, and at this feast Sweyn Asleifar-sonr, the last of the Vikings, killed Sweyn Breastrope. Sweyn As. had arrived at Orphir before the first day of Yule, and had a hearty welcome, being promised great honour by Earl Paul. The feast was to be a great one and many noble men had been invited.

'After that (the arrival of Sweyn As.) men went to Even-song. . . . There was at Orphir a large drinking hall . . . and a magnificent church stood facing the hall door ; and one

¹ The ball made fresh every year from bleeding the pig.

went down steps from the hall into the church. And when one entered the hall there was on the left a large flagstone and [between it and the hall] were a number of large ale-casks, but opposite the outer door there was a small room.

When men came from Evensong they were shown to their seats. The Earl made Sweyn Asleif's son sit next to him on the inner side, and next to the Earl on the outer side Sweyn Breast-rope. . . . And when the board was cleared the men arrived with the news that Walthjof Olaf's son had been drowned. . . . The Earl then gave orders that no one should annoy Sweyn Asleif's son during Yule. . . . And in the evening, when men had finished their drinking, the Earl went to bed and most of the men, but Breast-rope went out, and sat out all night,¹ as his custom was. And during the night men rose up and went to the church and heard Divine Service; and after High Mass the men returned to the board. Eyvind Maelbrigte's son had most of the management of the feast along with the Earl, and did not sit down [or go to the church]. The cup-bearers and torch-bearers stood before the Earl's table, but Eyvind filled the cups of each of the two namesakes. Now it seemed to Sweyn Breast-rope that Eyvind filled his cup higher but had taken back Asleif's son's cup before he had drained it; and he called Sweyn As. an unfair drinker. For long there had been no love lost between Sweyn Breast-rope and Olaf Hrolf's son, and hence between the namesakes. . . . And when drinking had gone on a while then they went to Nones. And when men came in again, memorial healths² were proposed and drunk from horns. Then Sweyn Br. wished to exchange horns with his namesake [for] he said he thought his horn was a smaller one. Eyvind then thrust a big horn into Sweyn Asleif's son's hand, and he offered that to his namesake. Then Sweyn Br. grew wroth, and muttered to himself, so that

¹To sit out, *sitja úti*, p. 238 of A. B. Taylor's translation says of Sweyn Breast-rope that he 'was deeply versed in the black art and had often engaged in out-sittings'. And see the note, p. 383. '*Útseta* was the term—a legal one indeed—for sitting out the night in the open for the purpose of conjuring up and communing with trolls'. It was a felony to sit out. Eyvind suggests to Sweyn As. that the fiend had put into Sweyn Br.'s mouth, during his sitting out, the words he uses on page 244.

²*Munni*, a memorial cup or toast at old sacrifices and banquets: in the heathen age these were consecrated to the gods Thor, Odin, etc., who on the introduction of Christianity were replaced by Christ, the Saints, the Archangel Michael, the Virgin Mary and St. Olaf.

[Cleasby and Vigfusson, *Icelandic-English Dict.* (1875).]

For a discussion of the word *Munni* and of older forms of the toast, see Jan de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, II, p. 134. cf. also p. 88 above.

some men heard them, including the Earl : ' Sweyn must be Sweyn's death, and Sweyn shall be Sweyn's death '. No attention was paid to this. The drinking now went on until Evensong. And when the Earl went out, then Sweyn As. went before him, but Sweyn Br. sat still drinking. . . . Eyvind repeats the words to Sweyn As. and said " that the fiend must have put those words into his mouth during the night ". (In the end Sveyn As. kills his namesake, but makes his escape.) [*The Orkneyinga Saga*, trans. by A. B. Taylor (1936), pp. 242-244.]

During Earl Rognvald's tour to the Holy Land in 1151 he was not allowed to attack a tyrant's castle in Galicia ' until after the Yule High Feast '. Under instruction from Bishop William, who was one of the expedition. [*Ibid.*, p. 289.]

This (Yule) is the chief festival of the season. At other times there may be scant, but now there is no want. . . . Every person, old and young, wears something new on Yule morning. The round peat fire blazes to the *crook-bauk*. The *kollie*, well fed with *sillok* oil, hangs on the *raep*, illuminating the *butt-end*. The *ben* room is lighted with an irregular tallow dip, stuck in the neck of an empty Dutch ' krook '.

The day is spent in feasting, and at night the service of the local fiddler is called for, and the merry-go-round of the Shetland *Rant* is kept up from house to house until Four-an'-twenty Day (18th January, O.S.) when the exhausted larders reminded the people that it was time to resume the more stern duties of life. [John Spence, *Shetland Folk-Lore* (1899), pp. 193-9.] Shet.

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